BANK HOLIDAY NUMBER. "Stories of the Stock Exchange." By Robert Machray. How John Hardy Was Tortured. (See "The Empress of the Earth.")

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 484. FOR WEEK ENDING APRIL 9TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

"FROMMS"

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This Costume also looks well in the pretty **Edinboro' Tweed**, price **18/6**

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EASTER BANK HOLIDAY NUMBER.

SHORT STORIES

Edited By C. ARTHUR PEARSON

No. 484.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week ending April 9th, 1898.

Out of the Snare.

THE summer's end was near, and a cold wind blowing off the sea made the men turn up their coat collars. A few more such evenings and the place would be dead. Even now it was an easy thing to secure a good table in the inclosure.

A hunchback, handsomely dressed, and with the air of a man of the world, sauntered along through the rows of chairs in search of a place out of the draught. His light coat caught in passing, and, without looking back he gave a little pull to loosen it, and there followed a faint exclamation of a girl's voice. He turned and raised his hat.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!"

The girl's face was very lovely, and he heard a few words of pity murmured half to herself, half to her companion:

"Poor fellow, isn't it a shame!"

The hunchback, finding the next table somewhat sheltered, sat down where he could watch her face. Being a philosopher he did not hate those who pitied him.

The girl was well worth looking at. She was cheaply dressed, with the abject insistence of prevailing fashion that characterises the woman ignorant of her good qualities, and there was the suggestion of the counter about her, but her figure was so supple, her face so youthfully sweet and delicately tinted, that a man looking at her must either have pitied her or have longed for her. The hunchback pitied her. Her companion, who was a tall, handsome man with bold blue eyes and an immobile face, evidently did the other thing.

The girl was restless, ill at ease, and seemed unaccustomed to her surroundings. She fidgeted with her gloves, pulling them off and on, and glanced timidly at

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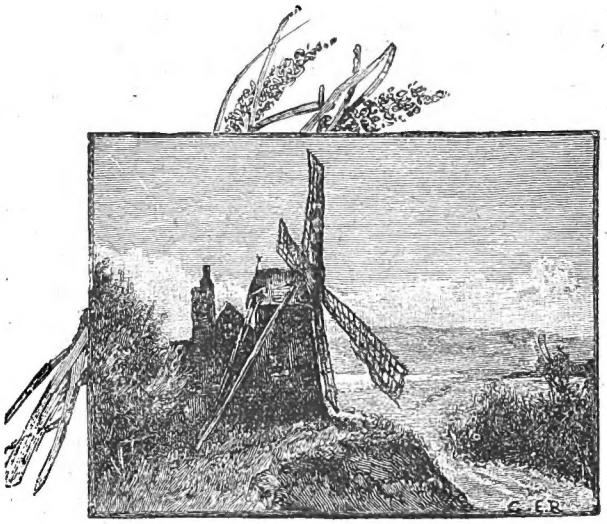

her escort, only to drop her eyes when she met his gaze.

"My dear child—what did you say your name was? oh, yes, Florrie—don't you like your champagne? Isn't it sweet enough? Or shall I get you something else?"

"Oh, no, thank you," said Florrie nervously. "It's very nice." She lifted her glass to her lips and took a short sip.

The man laughed.

"It's not what you thought it would be, is it?" he said. "There's a lot of romance about champagne, after all. You'd better try a Vermouth."

"No, thank you," said Florrie. "This is lovely." And she put out her hand to stop him as he motioned to a waiter. He caught the hand in his for an instant, then leant forward his elbow on the table, and began to talk to her in low tones.

The hunchback watching her face from his more secluded seat, saw her cheeks flush, her eyes fill and droop; yet her expression was hardly that of blissful anticipation.

"Poor little thing," said the hunchback to himself.

Suddenly the girl's companion sprang up.

"Excuse me one moment, won't you?" he said hastily. "There's a man over there that—I'll be back directly."

He called a waiter and ordered some wine for the girl. "Au revoir, little one," he added, and he made his way across the space in front of the bandstand, his handsome figure pushing on without apology. Reaching a table opposite, he seemed to be exchanging greetings with a party of four or five men, and to be resisting invitations to be seated. At last, with a shrug and a backward glance, he sat down, turning his back upon the table he had left.

Florrie sat still as he had left her, looking more nervous than ever. Her wine stood untasted, and she kept her eyes cast down, while waves of colour came and went upon her soft cheeks.. The hunchback rose at length, and sat down at her table.

"I hope I didn't hurt you when I brushed by you a few moments ago," he said gently.

"Oh, no, sir," said Florrie timidly, with a frightened glance across the garden at the broad back of her companion. She gathered her little belongings together, and half rose as if to flee to him, but the hunchback stopped her.

"Don't mind me," he said kindly; "I only came because this is hardly the place for you to sit alone. Your—friend should not have left you."

"Oh, he'll be back soon," she said, and sat down reassured.

"Is this your first visit here?" he asked, after a pause.

"It—no, not exactly," she answered with a quick flush. "I've been here once before with a gentleman and a lady, Miss Lehman, and a friend of hers."

"And who is Miss Lehman?"

"She's a girl who's in the same house of business as I am, and is down here for a holiday,—like me," explained the girl, waxing communicative under the influence of a sympathetic listener.

"She's an awf'ly nice girl, and a perfect lady. Older than I am, she is too."

"And do you like this place?" said the hunchback, in a low tone. He was beginning to long to do something for this girl, to warn her, to hold her back—and at any moment that man might return—and he did not know how to begin. He longed to be able to tell her of her peril, but how could he do it? He was so interested in the girl's situation that he hardly heard her answer.

"No—I mean—not so very; it isn't so much fun as I thought it was."

"That is a pity," said the hunchback And you look tired," he continued in a low tone. "Wouldn't you like to go home?"

The girl started and blushed again, but did not reply. Her eyes sought for an instant a table on the other side of the garden. His back was still turned, and they were laughing. His shoulders shook as he sat leaning forward, his arm on the table. Florrie's eyes, returning, met those of the hunchback with a look that was an inquiry and almost an appeal.

"Oh, I'll make it all right," he said cheerfully; "I'll explain it to—what is his name?"

"Mr. Jones," murmured Florrie, "but I don't quite like to——"

"Have you known him long," persisted the hunchback.

She turned white, then crimson, and hung her head.

"Oh, I know it's awful of me," she stammered. "He spoke to me on my way to my lodgings and we had dinner, and he said I'd like to come up here for a little while, so I did—and—and"—the tears began to chase each other down her pretty cheeks—"he's been awf'ly kind, only—I wouldn't ever have done it, only it's so dull at the lodgings, and Miss Lehman's out most of the time, and I don't know anybody else to speak to—at home it's dreadful to have to be alone all the evening, and—and—oh, I don't know *what* to do!"

She began to sob drearily and silently. The hunchback laid his hand lightly upon hers.

"I'll tell you what to do," he said softly, his eyes on the table across the garden, where a breaking-up seemed to be in progress. "Let me take you out of this." His breath came quick and his disengaged hand beat his cane nervously against the table.

"Never mind Mr. Jones," he continued eagerly, "he isn't worth it. He'd no business to bring you here and no right to leave you alone. Do come," he urged; "I'll explain to him."

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He rose with decision, and the frightened girl mechanically followed his example. He gathered up her possessions, and led her away, keeping as much in the shadow as possible.

Reaching the entrance, he looked back, his heart in his mouth. He saw the tall man making his way to the table he had left. "Maybe I'd better go back," whispered Florrie; "he may be angry, and he acted like a perfect gentleman."

"No, no," murmured the hunchback, "for goodness' sake—trust me." He hardly knew what he was saying, for a tall man with bold blue eyes was hurrying towards the entrance. He hurried Florrie along, and they pushed their way into the middle of a small crowd. They got away without being seen by Mr. Jones. The hunchback breathed more freely. He was able to make a poor jest on the outwitted escort of little Florrie. The girl did not respond. She was nervous, not certain of herself, perhaps even a little disappointed.

The girl's little hand lay upon the hunchback's arm; her pretty head was but little higher than his own. He had shunned the women of his own class, and this girl, winsome and temporarily dependent on him, was strange and pleasing. He did not speak, the silence was so pleasant. At last he was startled by the sound of sobbing beside him.

"Why, you poor child!" he cried, "what is the matter?"

He would have stopped, but she hurried him on.

"Oh! how good you are!" she cried; "I understand now—let us hurry! I'm so frightened!—Oh, I ought to thank you and I can't—I'll never forget—never—Oh, oh!"

She stopped, clutching his arm, her lips quivering, her tear-filled eyes gleaming in the bright light of a lamp. For the moment she was transfigured; there was a look of the woman's soul on her face brought there by the knowledge of her danger.

The hunchback fastened his eyes upon her, and drew a deep breath. His heart beat till he thought she must hear it. He looked at her cheap dress, her delicate face, from which the higher look was vanishing already; his head swam. Then he took the hand lying upon his arm and raised it to his lips.

"That is right," he said gently, "never forget—never!"

A fly was standing close to them and the hunchback led her to it. "Get in," he said. "Where shall I tell him? No, you shall tell him yourself; that will be better. Wait a moment, I had something to say to you'—what was it? Oh, I can't remember——"

"I want to thank you," panted the girl.

"No, dear, no. Good-night, good-night." He drew a half-crown from his pocket and thrust it into the hand of the driver.

"When she gives you the address, drive as fast as you can. Do you hear?"

And he pushed his hands into his pockets, and walked away as rapidly as he could.

A few yards further on he paused to listen to the lessening roll of the wheels. When he was out of hearing—"What an idiot I am!" he murmured. "I think the occasion demands that I get extremely intoxicated."

And he went back to the parade. It had grown very cold, and the lights glared, and the orchestra played out of tune. A withered leaf fluttered from one of the flower boxes and fell into the hunchback's tumbler. He fished it out and swore a little. There was no doubt that the end of the summer had come.

Wallace Wallis.

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Unearthed and Re-Edited by Robert Machray.

The Narrative of Colonel John Ambler, formerly of Sabine's Brigade.

There hath been so much said, and so much more wickedly imagined against him whom I was long proud to call my master, to wit, John Churchill, the first Duke of Marlborough, that it hath entered into my mind to make public that which is within my own knowledge of the famous diamonds of the Duchess.

Not that the Duchess's diamonds were ever made the subject of unseemly debate, save once, when the "dubious means" by which they came into the possession of her Grace were not obscurely hinted at by a certain rascally pamphleteer of Harley's party.

But I have considered this:—

Here is one affair of which now I alone know the fact; and in it I can see naught with which the Duke, my Lord, could be charged.

So, were the truth set out in each case that hath been brought forward against him, I cannot conceive but that the genius and the many high qualities of him whom even his enemies called the greatest man of his age—and of such an age—would shine forth.

For in the instance which I here relate, it will appear that his Grace did great service to Her Majesty in obtaining money by means of which he procured "timely and good advices"—to copy the words his Grace himself used, when he refuted the slanderous statements which had been founded upon the words of Sir Solomon Medina, of whom more anon—of the movements of the French in the Low Countries.

He also outwitted a knave, as I esteem him, and at the same time gave an especial degree of pleasure to his lady, whose true lover he was so long as he lived.

As all the world knoweth, his Grace was born in Devonshire, and there, I too; so that when I entered upon my career in the Army I was commended to his favour by this circumstance. Thus it was that on several occasions I was sent by him on secret and even perilous adventures, the conduct of which, a fair and successful issue having come about, was not displeasing to him.

Often would his Grace lament in my hearing, for he ever treated me as a friend, and one in whom he might trust, which, God wot, was true, how he was hampered in the field by the cavils of the Dutch Deputies, and more also in general by the want of money which he might use as he deemed to be of advantage for private intelligence and secret service, without having to render account to the Parliament in London.

For none knew better than he that there were times when secret moneys often might be employed to good purpose both in spying upon the enemy in his camps, and also in defeating and bringing to nought the plans of the French King, who was ever meditating this treachery or that.

During the war it hath been a common practice with the generals of the Army to procure moneys by various devices for their private purposes. Now, it hath been by obtaining such and such a sum from the persons who contracted for the supply of bread and provisions for the soldiers, or even of fodder for the horses; and, again, by the deduction of a per-centum from the pay given by the Emperor or other of the Allies.

There accompanied his Grace in most or perhaps all of his campaigns, one whom no man liked and many hated. This was Sir Solomon Medina, a Hebrew of vast wealth, whose business it was to provide bread and bread waggons for the army. Often was the food scant and poor, and the soldiers put the blame of this on Medina. But it was a matter of rumour that the rich Jew was so much in the confidence of the Duke of Marlborough—it was even said, what was a shameful thing to say, that the

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Duke was so much in the pay of Sir Solomon—that Medina was able to send intelligence of the result of his Grace's victories to London, and that by a day or two before his Grace's couriers arrived with his dispatches for the Queen.

Being but a plain man of the West country, and a soldier to boot—the hand that acts, and not the mind that guides—I marvelled greatly wherein lay an advantage to Medina in the use of this knowledge so quickly communicated, as was said, to his friends in England. I was now destined to perceive the why and the wherefore.

It was past the middle of the year 1708, and the Army of the Netherlands, which had been greatly heartened by the arrival of the Prince Eugene, knew that it was the Duke's mind to force a great battle, and so put an end to the war. Vendôme, a skilful general and a yet more skilful plotter, had procured the surrender of Ghent and Bruges by treachery, and the French now threatened the fortress of Oudenarde—a name not to be forgotten while men live upon the earth.

The great victory of Oudenarde was won by the Duke and the Prince Eugene—my master ever placed the Prince's name before his own, but herein I take leave to depart from his Grace—on the 11th of July. On the night of the 9th, the Duke sent for me to go to his tent, where presently I found him with Mr. Cardonnel, his Grace's secretary, but in so great a fever that he told me they had been trying to persuade him to go to Brussels, a project which he by no means entertained, as he was resolved to fight the French as soon as an opportunity served.

His Grace also said that he was greatly vexed by letters he had received from England, where the envy and malice of his opponents were ever quick to work him ill. Then he declared he was heartily weary of the war, and longed for nothing so much as to be at home with the Duchess and their children. Next he desired me in especial to keep near him, as he was minded to send me to England with news of the first great battle we might be engaged in, and so desired me to have all things in readiness for the journey.

The next day his Grace was better, and with a rapidity of movement which was truly wonderful, but which was characteristic of the Duke's generalship when he so ordered it, the army marched from Asche with but a brief halt or two all that day, most of the night, and all the following morning, until the Scheldt was crossed and the two armies met, coming to blows first of all on the high ground above Oudenarde.

It was past four o'clock in the afternoon before the battle was general. What followed was marked by a confusion and disorder which showed how little the French generals, and especially the Duke of Burgundy, could make up their minds what to do in the presence of so a great a captain as my master. According to his Grace's direction I kept as near him as I could, and it was not difficult to see that he was satisfied with what was going forward.

It was about nine in the evening, and the daylight was nearly fled. Once more the star of my Lord, the Duke, was in the ascendant, and another great victory of the English upon the French had fallen to be chronicled. The Duke called me to him, and never did I see him, always a man of noble and graceful appearance—whether soldier most or courtier most I cannot tell—more tranquil or composed.

And yet his first words showed perhaps why his mien was not marked by a greater feeling of exultation.

"Oh, for two more hours of daylight," he said, "and we should have made an end of this war!"

Then he protested in a manner most solemn that he preferred before any personal concern the good of his Queen and his country, and that nothing would make the Queen's business go so well if but the battle had been utterly decisive. Next he spoke of the knavish politics and designs of certain people who were near the Queen's person and were no friends of his, and how they kept him from the procurement of moneys which were needed for carrying on the war, which he now predicted might even yet continue for some time. "But," said he, "I see a way."

As for me, I was in a great amazement that any man on the instant of his having won so great a victory, a new glory to the arms of England, should, as it

"You can tell her ladyship that she may have the diamonds."

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were, take such calm and steady view of aught but the battle itself.

He gave me charge to get me to London as speedily as I might, giving me at the same time a letter for the Duchess, and the strange command to be to her an eye that should see, and an ear that should hear, and a tongue that should speak in no wise but as her Grace herself should bid me.

Above all, and this, it appeared, was the essence of the thing, I was straightly charged to be in London as soon as, or, if fortune might help so far, before the messengers of Medina. And if the chances of the way or of the wave were to prove themselves hostile to the adventure, it was to be my duty to strive to delay these riders of Medina. Then he gave me his hand and a private message for the ear of the Duchess only —the carriage of which to her Grace was a great honour to place upon me.

"You can tell her Ladyship," said he with a smile, as I was taking my leave, "that she may have the diamonds"—a speech the meaning of which I knew not at the time.

Men have said many harsh things against his Grace, but no man yet hath had the hardihood to make suggestion that the great Duke was not of all great men the most singular in this, that he was ever constant and faithful to his wife, the Duchess Sarah.

It so happened that the nearest road to Ostende, which was by way of Ghent, was in the hands of the enemy, and so I had to make my way in the night to Courtray, which lies to the south of Oudenarde, and then on to the highway, from which the port of Ostende is about eight leagues distant.

I told them a tale about myself.

I was mounted on my own beautiful horse, the equal of which for fidelity and swiftness I know not, and the ride was one that was within his powers; but there were many stragglers from the beaten army of Vendôme who would have liked nothing so much as cutting me off.

Being favoured by fortune, my journey proceeded without check or misadventure, and as the day broke I rode through a village, which I remembered in former years, of the name of Tourout, and I knew then that Ostende would be reached by me in safety, for it was but a few miles further on.

And here in the port I saw several vessels, and amongst them the *White Swan*, which I knew to belong to Sir Solomon Medina. And so I judged, the ship being all in readiness to set sail, that the messengers of the bread contractor had not yet arrived, but were expected. Then I went to an inn, where I was not unknown, and broke my fast, and inquired of mine host as to what time there would be a ship sailing for the Thames or some port as near London as could be reached at once. But I could hear of none, nor could I procure any.

While I was thus making no progress in the effort, two men entered the inn. It was easy to perceive that they were not soldiers, but, assuming an air of great importance, they called aside the keeper of the inn, and, after a time, they were good enough to devote to me a portion of their regard.

Then mine host approached me, and declared who they were: that they were about to sail for London in the *White Swan*, and that he had done his devoir to get passage for me along with them, and that they were not inclined to take me. However, he recommended me to speak to them myself.

Dropping his voice to a whisper, he thereupon asked me if I had heard the news of the Duke's defeat. I could scarce refrain from smiling, but I commanded myself, and asked him what he knew; to which he replied that the men whom I had seen talking to him had brought report that his Grace had been routed with great slaughter whilst he was crossing the Dender two days before.

I could not but make the observation to myself that these men must know—knowing the Duke's position so positively on the 10th—the exact time when the Duke had reached Lessines, and so had secured the passage of the Dender, and that it was most probable that they were also acquainted with what had followed, and so that it was most likely that they had come from Oudenarde itself. That they were Medina's men I hazarded a shrewd guess; for why else should they be sailing in the *White Swan*; but why was it, I could not but ask myself, that they were bruiting about a disaster to the Duke which was pure fiction.

So I kept my own counsel, and made bold to ask the two men further particulars of the battle. To which they, nothing loath, made response in an

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invention, complicated with many details, of how at last the most wonderful general of the time had been totally overthrown.

Calling for wine for their entertainment, I told them a tale about myself in return for their lies about the Duke of Marlborough.

I said I had been summoned to England to see my mother, who was on the point of death, but that I had encountered much difficulty in getting passage thither, and that I would be their servant to the extent of several broad pieces if they would take me with them on board the *White Swan*. But the senior of the two men, who seemed to be a person of authority, maintained that it was not possible, as their instructions forbade their doing anything of the sort.

However, I was resolved that go with them I should, and so, when they walked down to the ship from the inn, I went along with them, laughing and speaking to them as if I had given up all thought of going in their vessel, and, as I had nothing with me but my sword, they had no suspicions of me. Presently the ship was cast off, and as they were waving their adieux to me and I to them, it appeared no doubt to them that I stepped too far forward by mischance, and so fell into the water.

One of the crew threw me a rope which, being a fair swimmer, albeit very tired from my long ride, I was in no great hurry to take hold of. I made several feints, notwithstanding, to do so, until at last, perceiving how we were some distance from the shore, and fearing that after all they might not be too much inclined to have me on board the ship—which indeed I afterwards found to be the case—and so let me drown, I permitted myself to be drawn to the ship's side, and thence on to the deck, but in a very exhausted and almost dying condition. Indeed, I was so far spent that I swooned away.

When I came to myself, the master of the *White Swan* told me that there had been a great discussion and even some fierce words between the two men of Medina, but as the hours passed on without my making recovery, they at length agreed to leave me alone. Next morning we were in England, and having promised to pay them a hundred pieces when we arrived in London, we journeyed thither together, which was a great thing for me, as they had horses waiting for them. As they evinced some anxiety to finger my money, and in some sort, indeed, regarded me as their prisoner, held, as it were, for ransom, they procured horses for me also along the way.

Travelling with great diligence, we made London that night, and I had the happiness to deliver my Lord's letter to her Grace, and the private message with which he had charged me. The Duchess read over my Lord's letter once and then again, and then a third time. Dismissing me with many gracious words, after having asked how I had fared on the way, and particularly of the two men with whom I had travelled, she commanded me to wait upon her the following morning.

I had the happiness to deliver my Lord's letter to her Grace.

I had all but forgotten to give her Grace that last word of my master about the diamonds, but it came into mind in time, and I told her Grace of it. Whereupon she appeared highly delighted.

That night I slept as soundly as any other wearied wayfarer might do, yet in the morning I was up betimes, and I at once perceived, from the downcast looks of those I chanced to meet, that there was something evil or terrible in the air. Inquiring what the matter might be, I was near thrown into an ague on being told that the heavy news had come to the town that the Duke of Marlborough, hitherto the invincible captain of the age, had suffered a sore defeat at the hands of Vendôme and the Duke of Burgundy.

My mind is not of that sort which thinks or reasons quickly, but to connect this most infernal report with the two men of Medina, along with whom I had journeyed, would have been not difficult even for a child. Yet being but simple and unskilled in the meaning of so cruel an artifice, I did wonder.

Yea, for one brief space, the thought did come: "Could there be even a shred of truth in the story?" However, I dismissed this absurd notion the moment it came.

When I waited upon her Grace, I thought it within my duty to mention what was now the talk of the town; to which the Duchess replied, as one who was well pleased, and in possession of some key to the riddle I could not read—that the thing suited marvellously well.

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Remembering the Duke's strange command of silence which he laid upon me, I had held my peace, saying never a word, good or bad, as to what I knew of the bloody battle of Oudenarde and the destruction of the French. And now, here was my Lady, who *knew* that there indeed had been a great victory, appearing well disposed to hear that the tidings of my Lord's overthrow should be shaking the hearts of all men in London.

"You shall know," she said with a sprightly movement, "this evening or to-morrow."

"The Queen?" I made bold to say.

Then her Grace said that she would take me to see the Queen that night, but that she had other business which she desired me to transact for her, and which would occupy me all that day. She gave me two letters, one having the address on it of Sir Francis Child, at "The Marygold," in Fleet Street, and the other that of Sir Charles Duncombe, at "The Grasshopper," in Lumbard Street, both of whom were goldsmiths and bankers of great reputation.

Her Grace likewise said, although I have since thought that she did intend to throw dust into my eyes, only the event turned out so pat, that Sir Charles Duncombe had for sale some diamond pendants with three brilliant drops to each, which she greatly admired, and which his Grace had promised to give her on his winning his first great battle of the campaign of that year. She added that if the matter should prove according to her expectations, I might have the pleasure of bringing them to her on my return from Lumbard Street in the afternoon.

We greeted each other.

So I hied me toward the City, and presently in Fleet Street came upon the sign of the Childs, "The Marygold," carved in oak, its ground painted green with a gilt border, and above it the rising sun; underneath was the motto of Sir Francis, "*Ainsi mon âme.*" Having delivered the letter of her Grace, I was desired by Sir Francis himself to go with his partner to Lumbard Street to meet Sir Charles Duncombe, whither we accordingly went.

Here there is a great hive of busy goldsmiths and exchangers dealing in the national funds and stocks after methods which were invented in the time of the late King William, and there be many of these very rich merchants, each with his own device above his door, such as "The Black Horse," "The Grapes," "The Goat," "The Flower de Luce," "The Black Boy," and so forth.

But it was in Change Alley, at the Royal Exchange, which one hath called "a narrow sound, but deep as Hell, Change Alley, dreadful name!" that we met with Sir Charles Duncombe, who looked ill at ease and much depressed, as he said, over the news of the defeat of the Duke of Marlborough. On taking him aside and delivering to him the letter of her Grace, I perceived a sudden joyful change to express itself upon his countenance. Yet scarcely had this happiness shone forth from his eyes when it instantly disappeared, being replaced by his former dolorous air and habit of melancholy.

Then the two goldsmiths discussed in my hearing and in that of others who joined themselves to us, what would be the result upon the war of the disaster which had befallen the Duke in the Low Countries. One said this thing, and another that; but all declared with one accord that it was a grievous and heavy matter for the Queen and the country, and then they would shake their heads and sigh.

Yet, notwithstanding all their dejection, I did observe that they ceased not for a moment to carry on their business of buying and selling the Funds, although it certainly seemed to me that there were many people who sold and never bought, and others who bought and did not sell. There was much hubbub and a babble of voices, and, as I stood and gazed upon the Alley, which was now packed with people, and watched their aspect and gesture, and all the excitement and the turmoil of the place, I could not but think that here again I was looking on at what was in some sort a battle, and herein I was right, as I afterwards learnt.

I spent nearly all the day with these merchants, being requested in especial to do so by Sir Charles Duncombe, who said he would probably have an

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important message to send her Grace by me that afternoon. As I walked about, having excused myself to Sir Charles, I chanced to meet, just under the ensign of "The Angel and the Crown," another goldsmith's shop, one of the two men of Sir Solomon in close and earnest conversation with the Hebrew banker.

This was he who acted as the senior of the two, and who first told me of the defeat of the Duke when we had encountered each other in the tavern at Ostende. When he saw me advancing to speak to him, being desirous to ask him to what house I should send the hundred pieces which I had promised for my passage money, he looked at me with great surprise and wonder, and as one not too well pleased with the meeting. However, we greeted each other, and, after a few words about the money I had bargained to give him, he inquired of me if I ever took an adventure in the Funds—a manner of speaking which was as dark as night to me.

To him I replied, and that with some coldness, that I was a soldier and that fighting was my trade; as for money I liked it well enough, but knew no way of getting it save by the sword.

Being in no wise offended at my speech, he made answer that there were other ways of getting it and more certain. "Here," said he, "is a place where gold lies about the streets for them that know the secret of it." As I inquired more of the matter, he explained to me that on such a day as the present, when everyone was heavy and dejected by reason of the news of the Duke's defeat, that people sold out what sums they had in the Funds, and would be content to obtain well nigh any price offered provided it was in gold or silver.

"Then," continued he, "it may fall out that the Duke's defeat may be but a small affair, may be even no defeat at all; the same people who sold to-day thinking the world was about to end, will buy back to-morrow into the Funds, and be content to pay a much higher price than that at which they now sell."

Thanking him for his courtesy I left him, and as it was now nigh about four o'clock in the afternoon, I went on to "The Grasshopper," musing as I proceeded on what sort of strange business this was; and now it flashed upon me like a sudden light what was the plan of the Duke, and why silence had been enjoined upon me.

I now perceived that it had been Medina's purpose to spread abroad the report of the defeat, although he knew all the time that it was a great victory, and so to induce holders of the Funds, being thrown into a panic by the news, to sell out, when, doubtless, he would have his agents and brokers to buy for him. Then, when the tidings of the victory had arrived, and the spirits of men were raised thereat, he would be in readiness to supply back again to them the Funds, and that at his own price.

This had been his practice on other occasions, and my master, the Duke, must have been aware of it, and was now taking advantage of it for his own ends. As I afterwards discovered, Sir Charles Duncombe, with the support of Sir Francis Child, who was banker to my Lord, the Duke, had acted in such a manner that he stood in the place of Medina on behalf of the Duke.

It was easy to be seen that the goldsmiths were well satisfied, and when we three, Sir Charles, one of the Childs, and myself, were all closeted together in a private room, they threw off the cloak of sadness they had constrained themselves to wear, and shouted with glee like boys at school. To-morrow, they told me, the Duke's courier, Lord Stair, was expected to arrive in London, when the whole truth would be known in regard to the glorious field of Oudenarde.

It was now that Sir Charles went out of the room, and presently returning, handed to me a handsome case which he bade me open. In it were the diamonds of which the Duchess had spoken to me in the morning.

Sir Charles told me that the Duchess the winter before had desired my Lord to buy these diamonds for her, but he had put the matter off to a more convenient season, as he was short of money at the time. The Duke, knowing what a great sum he would be likely to obtain through the operation of the goldsmiths, had ordered Sir Charles to send the Duchess the diamonds, if there would be only a good probability of the successful issue of his plans.

They also gave me a letter for the Duchess, along with the case, and I afterwards learnt that the two bankers, who were reputed the richest men in the city, having made a large amount along with the Duke, had together made a present of these diamonds to her Grace.

As for me, I was not altogether satisfied with the part I had played in this affair, albeit a soldier's duty is to obey, until the Duke himself had told me that the money he had obtained by his campaign in Change Alley had been devoted to the secret service and private intelligence of the army, whereby throughout the rest of the summer of 1708 my Lord was able to receive the information which led to the capture of several of the great forts of the enemy.

However, I was better pleased when the Duchess took me with her to see the Queen; and as I had been given leave to say what I knew, I told her Majesty of the great victory her Army had achieved.

It hath been customary to give the messenger bringing such tidings as I announced to the Queen, a reward of £500, but that in this case belonged by right to my Lord Stair, who was the Duke's courier by formal appointment. But the Queen would have it that I should be given the £500, which I begged leave upon my knees to be allowed to refuse; whereupon her Majesty commanded that I should be given her portrait set in precious stones.

Next day there was none in London but knew that Oudenarde had been fought and won; and, next to a victory itself, there is nothing that so stirs the souls of men as the report thereof.

(Next Week: "The First Black Friday.")

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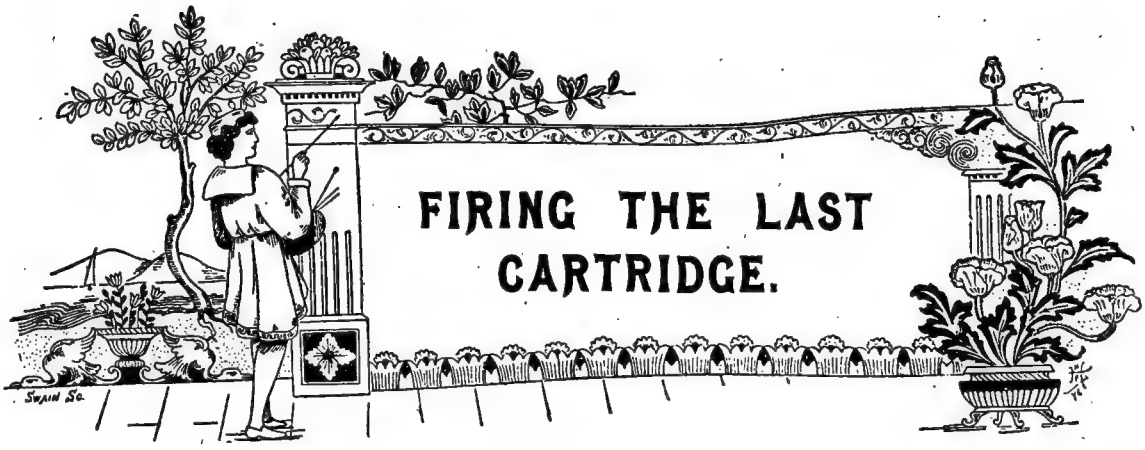

FIRING THE LAST CARTRIDGE.

It was the first of September, 1870. From four o'clock in the morning the formidable noise of the firing and the smoke filled Bazeilles, Balon, and the vicinity. Many times those two villages had been taken and retaken.

About seven o'clock the Germans were repulsed by the celebrated bayonet charge of the Second Regiment of Marine Infantry, and yielded on all sides and gave way. The main street of Bazeilles, the adjacent streets, the gardens, the ditches, were full of human bodies and Bavarian wounded. But the enemy energetically sustained themselves and attacked us with more troops, before which our exhausted and decimated soldiers were obliged to retire.

At this moment I heard the Colonel call Captain Bourgey, of the Thirteenth Company, and order him to occupy the large house facing the street, and commissioned him to defend and keep it, cost what it might. It was the house called "Bourgerie."

I was then an under-officer in the Thirteenth Company, which by the combat of the day before had been reduced to only sixty men.

Captain Bourgey took possession of the house and ordered the Fifth Company to follow him. This was the company of Delaury, in which also there were no more than sixty or seventy men.

The two lieutenants had been killed. The two under-lieutenants were Escombet and Saint Felix. M. Bourgey, the oldest by rank, was to conduct the defence.

A few minutes after we had been installed we saw our men in retreat, passing near the house. Two officers, Captains Aubert and Vicard, had only time to take refuge with us in order to avoid the firing which was threatening, and also at the same time we received Commander Lambert, wounded in the ankle and supported by two soldiers. It was eight o'clock.

Rapidly M. Bourgey distributed his forces, and soon we heard a continuous discharge coming from both floors, from the ground floor, and from the roof, gathering a rich harvest from the Saxon forces.

We suffered also from the fire of the enemy, because the projectiles fell heavily upon our open window; but as they were coming obliquely from below, the soldiers warned, could very easily, by stooping just a little, avoid a greater part of the shots. At any rate, we took good aim, resting our guns on any support, and every ball counted.

I recollect that Captain Bourgey, our former professor of shooting, and Captain Aubert, both very remarkable marksmen, slaughtered the Germans as if they were ordinary game. They were on the second floor, and from there M. Bourgey conducted the defence, while in the other parts of the house Delaury and Escombet conducted the firing of their followers.

About half-past eight an incident happened. We had not eaten for thirty-six hours, and hunger tormented our stomachs cruelly. In the cellar some soldiers discovered many barrels of wine and beer, and upon the shelves of the closet were large jars of butter.

One can guess the result of the discovery. Soon our sergeant came to warn Captain Bourgey that many soldiers had invaded the basement, had opened the barrels, and were drinking with avidity.

The Captain went downstairs immediately, and noticed that some soldiers were really very excited. The moment was badly chosen for such a banquet. How to prevent the consequences of such a bad example, and forbid thirsty soldiers access to the barrels to slake their thirsts! Captain Bourgey, thanks to his presence of mind, solved the situation.

"But don't you know," he said, "that the Bavarians slept here last night, and that they poisoned those barrels?"

The effect was like a thunderbolt. All the soldiers fled, asking for an antidote, which M. Bourgey promised them if they repulsed the enemy and opened the way to the drug store.

Being quieted by this, our officers remained alone in the cellars, where they could refresh themselves, quickly dividing among them some biscuits with butter, and drinking glasses of wine pretended to be poisoned. Then they went upstairs. However, the cartridges were nearly all used. An under-officer was placed as sentinel on the roof, to keep the Captain *au courant* of the disposition taken by the enemy. The Germans, after many fruitless efforts to take us in front, tried an attack from the rear, by which manœuvre we were completely isolated, and in the centre of the Bavarian army. Our position was a desperate one.

As we were obliged to succumb without any profit to our cause, our officers discussed the question of making a sortie which, perhaps, would permit us to join our troops, who were in retreat. But this sortie; is it possible? To leave the house by the door was such a

perilous adventure that none of us could escape death. They decided to make the exit by the rear, by making a hole in the wall with a bar of iron found in the court-yard.

The wall was thick and solid; the work advanced very slowly—so slowly that after an hour the hole was only made large enough for one man to pass. Our minutes were numbered. We would be obliged to abandon the house, one by one, creeping along, and besides, we should be obliged to leave Commandant Lambert, which we would not do at any price. Notwithstanding the supplications of this brave officer, who desired us to go without him, saying that the interest of the Fatherland should take the place of personal interests, we renounced the retreat.

After getting the opinion of all our officers of both companies, our chief decided that we would defend ourselves as long as any means remained. Besides, we had hopes that our troops would get us out of this difficult situation.

Alas! about ten o'clock, General von de Tann, warned of our desperate resistance, succeeded in bringing near one battery of artillery. But scarcely was it in position than the soldiers were killed with our bullets. Others took their places, and were killed in their turn. Finally the guns were protected behind some obstacle. Now we were at their mercy. A cannon ball struck the right wing of the house, and destroyed it with a great noise. The second projectile fell upon the roof, which it demolished and set on fire. Many men were killed by the falling débris; the bullets succeeded one another without interruption—we were surrounded by flames.

In the meantime the Bavarian Infantry, reinforced, profited by our bad situation, and advanced to the walls, where our bullets could not reach them. The situation was most critical.

In fact, in looking about, at the risk of being killed, the sentinel above saw soldiers were digging below the walls of our improvised fortress for the purpose of blowing us up in the air. I confess that at this moment many of our men were entirely disconcerted. The alternative of being blown up by the explosion or crushed under the roof destroyed by the artillery, and in either case to be roasted alive among the ruins, had nothing particularly pleasant, and was enough to move the courage of the firmest.

At the same moment the hurrahs of the Bavarians, and their bugle calls, announced that we were about to be annihilated, and they rushed to the pillage.

I remember besides that, notwithstanding the noise, I heard distinctly the cries of the German officers: "*Ergeben Sie sich! Ergeben Sie sich!*" ("Surrender! surrender!") We answered by bullets.

We were sustained by the tenacity and cold blood of our officers, who, in this dramatic crisis, preserved an astonishing presence of mind. I still see Commandant Lambert, lying suffering from his horrible wound, who urged us on to the struggle; I still see Captain Bourgey in many places at once, facing the storm in every place and giving us encouragement to hold out until the reinforcements approached; I still see Captain Aubert, stimulating our energy by showing the bodies of enemies killed by our bullets; Lieutenant Escombet, intrepid and audacious, boldly risking his life.

I see, too, alas! our comrades killed or wounded lying upon the floor of the rooms. How many broken arms and legs, how many crushed chests, how many open skulls! What blood!

About half-past ten Captain Bourgey was struck on the leg by a piece of wall detached by a cannon ball, and fell down fainting. His wound gave him a momentary shock, but was without gravity, and fifteen minutes later he was able to renew the combat.

At eleven o'clock we had only eleven cartridges. Our officers vied with each other for the honour of firing them and killing the last Germans. After this we could do nothing. We only stoically waited for the explosion under our feet.

Our agony was horrible.

Suddenly the door of the house, which we had barricaded with furniture, was violently forced open, and a crowd of Bavarians invaded the ground floor with bayonets on their guns. The horrible butchery commenced in the midst of the clashing of steel. But we were overcome, three fourths of those still living were wounded and exhausted; the struggle was too unequal.

When even we repulsed the assailants and went into the court. We fell in the midst of the enemy, whose irritation was at its height.

They rushed upon us to disarm and massacre us. We would have passed a sad fifteen minutes had it not been for the intervention of the Bavarian captain, M. Lissiguano, who saved our lives in turning aside these furious ones. I heard the generous adversary say at this moment in very good French:

"The unhappiness of to-day is upon you; to-morrow perhaps it will be our turn. I was eight years in your foreign legion in Africa, and I esteem the chivalric character of your nation. Honour, then, the courage of the unhappy! You are prisoners of war, and you have the right to be protected by the conqueror."

Then, Escombet, desperate, tried to shoot himself because he did not want to support the humiliation of captivity. It was M. Bourgey himself who wrenched away his revolver, and told him to preserve his existence which, later, would be precious to his country.

We were disarmed. The officers, however, by the special favour of General von der Tann, and on account of our heroic defence, kept their arms.

Before the intervention of Captain Lissiguano, we were literally plucked by the Bavarians, who had emptied our pockets and taken all our possessions. Many of our men succeeded in concealing their most precious objects by slipping them into their boots, and in that way they were seriously impeded in marching to Kencourt, where they conducted us.

There the priest gave us dinner. He placed beds for the officers, and the encampment for the soldiers, in the church. It is from the church that we followed the last phases of the battle.

But we must return to relate the episode worthy of being known.

We were disarmed, and we abandoned the house of combat, when one shot from the first floor struck one of the Prussian officers mortally. It was our last cartridge. It was fired by an Alsatian, a soldier by the name of Tapfkeit, from the Thirteenth Company, who sent to the enemy his last souvenir.

Two Bavarians rushed to kill the offender. He let them come, and at the moment when they approached him, he seized the revolver of the officer who was near and fired two bullets upon the aggressors, who fell to the ground.

After turning his pistol against himself, he cried!

"*A bas les Prussiens! Vive la France!*"

Then he shot himself. Honour this obscure hero.

Le Vier.

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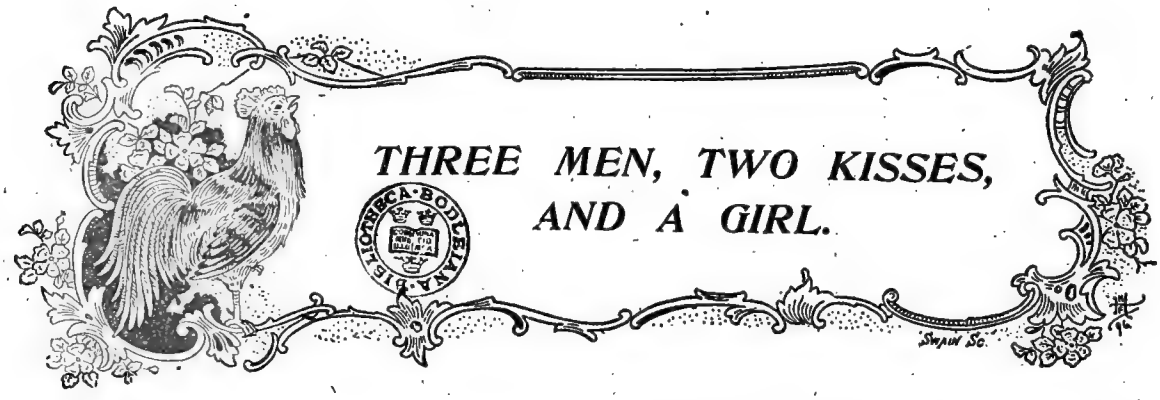

THREE MEN, TWO KISSES, AND A GIRL.

Major Penton,

To Miss Isabel Hobson *Dr.*

To One Kiss, delivered.....£1,000.

A prompt remittance will oblige.

This was the Major's Easter egg. Small wonder that he felt out of sorts, and that even three brandy-and-sodas utterly failed to restore his equanimity. This little bill epitomised a whole volume of incident. It was something like this:

A man named Harrington—who, by request of some member whose name no one has since been able to discover, had secured the privileges of the Major's club for a fortnight—was the cause of it all, and it happened on a certain "ladies' night," destined never to fade from the memory of poor Penton.

In the course of the evening there had entered a woman who was universally conceded to be a "poem of loveliness," and whom the Major characterised as a "dream." The Major, flattered by the reputation of being the most distinguished looking man in the club, was introduced, obtained the favour of a waltz, and afterwards retired to the card-room in a state of perspiration and tender sentiment.

By seeming chance—but, as the Major discovered later, by fell design—Harrington met him at one of the whist tables.

Harrington also had met and danced with the Major's "dream," and the Major, softened to temporary imbecility by his evening's experience, looked upon Harrington as a rival, and wondered what the effect would be if he quarrelled with a visiting member and called him out.

"How about a game, Major?" asked Harrington.

The Major looked round. They two were alone in the card-room.

"It would suit me exactly," replied the Major, "if we had two more to make out the hand."

"We need not play whist," said Harrington smoothly. "However, you probably prefer the society of Miss Hobson——"

"That is a matter, sir," replied the Major bluntly, "that lies entirely between Miss Hobson and myself. I am quite ready for any game you like."

The Major dropped into a chair, and Harrington smiled in an exasperating way as he placed the cards on a table, and remarked:

"I have an appointment with her myself towards the close of the evening. Delightful girl, charming."

The Major grunted as the cards were dealt. Such remarks by Harrington were highly distasteful to him. Without more ado they began to play, and, although the Major thought he played well, he was beaten easily, and soon relieved of his ready money.

Penton's animosity was expressed in his play. He would not have left the table at that stage for a cool thousand.

"I am out of money," he said, "but a cheque——"

"I don't want your money," interrupted Harrington, "but I have the honour to propose a wager worth while accepting—that is, if you dare accept it."

"Dare, sir, dare!" blustered the Major. "What is the wager, sir?"

"We will play one more game on this condition: that the loser pays the penalty by kissing Miss Hobson."

The Major was on his feet in an instant.

"How you can have the brazen impudence, sir, to suggest such a thing, passes my comprehension!" he exclaimed.

Harrington was not ruffled in the least.

"I admit," he said, "that the odds are greatly in my favour. If I lose, the great and plainly apparent esteem in which the lady holds me places me in a position to cancel my obligation without any great difficulty. You, on the contrary, should you lose, might have considerable trouble."

A red flush diffused itself over Penton's features.

"And do you presume to set yourself above me in the esteem of Miss Hobson?" he queried. "Egad! I'll play the game if for nothing else than to take the conceit out of you!"

And they did play it—and the Major lost. As he rose from the table he was well-nigh overwhelmed at the prospect before him.

"Difficult, almost impossible, as the task is for you, I shall yet insist upon your performing it," declared Harrington.

"I am a man of my word," replied the Major haughtily.

He was also a man of infinite resource, although he did not say it, and he did not think that to him anything was impossible, but he very shortly departed for his home to consider how best to proceed in the difficult matter before him.

To kiss a young lady, to do this deliberately and upon slight aquaintance—the task was herculean! The Major must be tactful, diplomatic. He must summon all his reserve forces and marshal them skilfully; even then he might meet his Waterloo. He could not go at this thing with dash and *verve*; he must be artful, courtly, and agreeable, and he must play a waiting game.

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There was one point in his favour; he suddenly remembered that the elderly lady who accompanied Miss Hobson had invited him to call. He had attributed this invitation to his handsome appearance. Here undoubtedly was the Open Sesame.

On the following afternoon he availed himself of her invitation. Fortune favoured him; Mrs. Maitland was out, but Miss Hobson was at home and would be pleased to see him.

Miss Hobson received him with delightful unconventionality. As they conversed, the fair one in some bewitching way made it seem as though they had known each other for years.

They first became familiar, then confidential, and then—— Well, they were looking at some etchings. Suddenly the Major's cherished ideas of tact, diplomacy, and a waiting game were cast to the winds. By an impulse that was irresistible he bent forward, kissed the lady at his side and straightened up with an air of martial dignity, his thoughts seeking to evolve an explanation which somehow wouldn't come.

But no explanation was needed. Miss Hobson simply laughed and went on looking at the pictures.

The Major was greatly disturbed. Was it possible that he saw the shadow of impending evil already hovering above his devoted head? When he left, Miss Hobson bade him farewell with an air of proprietorship which he did not relish. A rough hand had suddenly sounded a discord on the harp of the Major's fancy. Of course Miss Hobson was beautiful, charming, but—well, there were others.

The Major was a little disgusted with himself when he went to bed that night. When he got up he was greeted with the bill whose single item is duly set forth at the beginning of this veracious chronicle.

After mature reflection, the Major sat down and wrote the following note:

Miss Isabel Hobson,

Madam,—Your bill came duly to hand. I have no recollection of having ordered the goods invoiced; but, be this as it may, is not your price a little high?—Very truly,

J. Thomas Penton.

The following afternoon the Major had the great pleasure of reading these lines:

Dear Sir:—It matters little whether or not you ordered the goods. You certainly received them, and the courts hold this to be a bona-fide expression of debt. To refresh your memory, I inclose a photograph taken at the time goods were delivered. As to my price being exorbitant, please reflect that I could have made it two thousand as well as one.—Hoping for an early remittance, I remain, yours truly,

Isabel Hobson.

A cabinet photograph of himself in the act of kissing Miss Hobson had dropped on the floor. He groaned as he picked it up and looked at it.

At this interesting point a servant announced Mr. Ralph Summers, a friend of the Major's.

"I can't see him now," said the Major. "I just simply can't! Tell him to call again."

"But he says he must see you," returned the servant; "he says it is a case of life and death."

The Major could not resist this appeal, and he hastily tucked Miss Hobson's letter and the photograph into a convenient drawer and arose to meet his friend.

Mr. Summers was round of form, bald and florid. He was pallid, extremely nervous, and there was a wild glare in his eyes.

"Major," he said hoarsely, sinking into a chair, "you see before you a desperate man. I am ruined, sir. My character is gone, and when a respectable member of Society finds his character gone, what relief is there but in the laudanum bottle? Where can——"

"That will do, Summers!" broke in the Major. "You seem to imagine that you're the only man in the country that can have trouble. Egad, sir, you have no monopoly of despair."

"But you don't know it all, Major. Why, it's simply awful! To think that I, at my time of life, should rashly bet that I could—could kiss a certain woman in within twenty-four hours, and——"

"Wait a minute!" cried the Major. "Let me understand you. You made a bet that you would kiss a certain woman within twenty-four hours?"

"I did," was the hollow rejoinder.

"What, here?"

"Yes, here!"

"When?"

"A month ago."

"Was there anything else? Don't hesitate, Summers. You are not the only fool in this broad land. Unbosom yourself."

"It is all a trap," went on Summers hotly. "The man with whom I made the bet was in the scheme: the woman I was to—to kiss had also a hand in the plot. I kissed her, they photographed me while I did it, and now—now she threatens to sue me for five hundred pounds. It's blackmailing, but for me there remains only death or disgrace, unless you lend me this five hundred. That's what I came to see you about."

"Have you the lady's letters?"

"Yes, all."

"Give them to me—and the photograph?"

"I have that also."

"Let me see it."

Tremulously Summers produced a small packet of letters and a photograph and handed them to his friend. The Major looked at the photo and, as he had surmised, the young lady in question was none other than Isabel Hobson.

"This is a very serious matter, Summers, very serious," remarked the Major, with a dry cough, "and it is well that you came to me in your trouble. You have been very foolish."

"Don't chaff me about it, don't!" wailed Summers. "Haven't I borne enough?"

"If I promise to get you out of this, will you promise never to make a fool of yourself again?"

"Of course! But can you do it?"

"I will do my best. Call to-morrow at this time and I will report."

Summers went away and the Major smiled broadly as he seated himself at his desk and wrote the following:

Miss Isabel Hobson.

Madam,—Your letter is at hand, and the photograph is extremely natural; it exactly resembles another photograph which I have seen, and which was taken about a month ago. I inclose your bill against me, and also a bill against my friend. A comparison of the two bills shows that you are attempting to make us both pay for the same goods, and the courts hold that this is unlawful, to say the least. I, therefore, request that you return both bills to me receipted. If you do not, I shall be compelled to take the other horn of the dilemma. With you, however, it strikes me as being simply a case of Hobson's choice.—Truly yours,

J. Thomas Penton.

It is needless to say that the bills came back receipted, and Summers never knew how his friend the Major had saved him. His friend the Major would never tell.

H. Blythe.

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THE MAN WHO WAS LEFT

This is the tale that was told by Lum Yu concerning the man Ching Ting.

It was New Year's Eve in Canton, and Ching Ting, the ivory carver in Curio Street, had cleaned up his shop, lighted his Joss sticks, and set up two little red tapers before the niche in the wall containing the tablet to the honour of the Earth God.

The front of his ten-foot establishment Ting had illuminated by hanging out a gay lantern, whereon was inscribed, in scarlet and gold, the words: "The favoured of Heaven."

An hour before midnight, having settled his accounts with the merchants, Ting had gone off as usual to the Temple of Longevity, in the Street of Accumulated Blessings, there to lay his offering at the feet of the great gilded Buddha, that watches over the life of every man, from the day of his birth till the day when, summoned to the World of Darkness, he leaves the World of Light.

Now Ting, you must know, was born in the fifth year of Kwong Si; and at the time of which we are speaking was the oldest man in the province of Twang Tung, being indeed no less than one hundred and eighty years old. Something over a century before Ting had opened the shop in Curio Street and married his fourth wife.

For more than a century and a half his name had appeared on the books of the Long Life Insurance Company as the annual subscriber of a silver dollar; and yet here he was on this New Year's Eve paying his devotions and presenting his offerings, just as he had been doing for a matter getting well on now for two hundred years. When Ting rounded the century, and showed no signs of migrating to the "family mausoleum," whither his sons, who had duly presented him on his sixty-first birthday with a very handsome piece of funereal furniture, specially designed for his own use, had already preceded him, his heir-at-law, distressed and dismayed, was advised to consult an astrologer.

"It was pretty evident," said the disinterested counsellors, "that the demons must be at work. It is quite possible, you know," said they, "for the evil spirits to keep the body living long after the soul has gone out of it, which is a dreadful thing for the poor soul, since it cannot get admittance at the gates of Yáma without its body, and must just roam about the Dark World, the prey of demons and devils, till its body is deposited in the Ancestral Hall."

The astrologer, however, couldn't complete his calculations, "owing," he said, "to disturbing influences;" and by-and-bye the heir died, and Ting, dressed in white, followed him, as he had followed many before him.

It was clear to the meanest intellect in Canton that Yáma, the Lord of Death, had forgotten the ivory carver, whose house in the Happy Valley had been waiting for him so long that it had cost fully as much to repair as it did to build.

The Long Life Insurance Company had certainly made a handsome penny out of Ching Ting.

Wives, children, neighbours, acquaintances, grandsons and great grandsons, Ting had seen them all depart for their new homes in the City of the Silent. Generation had succeeded generation, and he only was left—still hale, still hearty, feeling neither the weight of his years nor looking at one hundred and eighty, a day older than when he had just touched the half century.

Every morning, Ting entered his shop at the hour which had been his custom from his youth up, and, plying his tools with all the skill and dexterity which had made his name famous in every mansion and temple within a hundred miles, he worked all day at his trade of an ivory carver.

Ching Ting was a puzzle to himself. Sometimes he doubted whether it was right for him to be here after all his generation had gone—whether it wasn't, in fact, a scandal and a shame. That some people thought it most shockingly indecorus of him he knew.

Sometimes he wondered whether he hadn't better take the matter into his own hands and perform the happy dispatch.

But the thing that was past all understanding was that, whereas Ting had actually gone down to the "gates" twice before passing his fiftieth birthday, but, finding them shut, had returned, he had known neither ache nor pain since—and, from that day also, the man had never altered in appearance by a single hour. He was, in fact, invulnerable. Nothing harmed him. He walked scatheless through every danger. At the great earthquake the ivory carver came out unhurt, while his neighbours on either side were buried in the ruins. It

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The astrologer, however, couldn't complete his calculations.

was the same when the tornado swept away ten thousand houses—Wen and Yen were taken, but Ting was left. In the year of the Black Plague, this experience was repeated. No matter who suffered, no matter what happened, Ting lived on. And now, here was the New Year round again; and Ching Ting, to all appearances, as likely to see the next hundred as he certainly had seen the last. Why, it was a positive fact that Ting had actually announced himself that morning as being on the look-out for a new wife—the last Mrs. Ting, who was the twelfth in succession from the first, having left her disconsolate husband behind her six months previously. For, notwithstanding his weight of years, Ting, as we have said, was not perceptibly older on this New Year's Eve than on that other, which lay so far back, that one hundred and thirty years now rolled between. Fifty, he owned up to then; and to such as did not know his strange history, he was no more than fifty now.

Having settled his affairs then for the year, Ching went off with an easy mind to pay his devotions in the Temple of Longevity.

But on New Year's morning, the cup of cold water at the door of Ting's house told the passer-by that the ivory carver had been summoned, and had gone his last journey.

Ching Ting had fallen dead on his own threshold immediately after his return from the midnight service.

That was a busy day for the gossips.

By-and-bye, however, the truth leaked out; and sure enough, here again, there was a woman at the bottom of it.

The twelfth Mrs. Ting was a lady of an inquiring mind, and greatly was she exercised over the mystery surrounding her husband. Now it happened that about eleven months before she went from this wicked world, and left Ting a sorrowing widower, a very devout disciple of Buddha, a priest of the highest caste, had taken up his quarters in a monastery on the White Cloud Mountains, three hours' journey from the city. He brought with him a great reputation for learning and piety. It was even reported that Sam-Su, which was his name, could hold converse with the spirits in the Dark World. To him repaired the curious Mrs. Ting, eager to get his opinion of her husband's case. The holy man considered profoundly for a while, and delivered himself in these words:

"To every man who cometh into this world, is allotted a single page in the great Book of Account; and, when that is filled up, be it sooner or be it later, Yáma, the Lord of Death, turns it down, writes his name on the back, and sends for him. Why Ting's leaf has not been turned down my knowledge of the Sacred Books does not enable me to say. But, be it a thousand years hence until the leaf *be* turned down the man will continue to live. Yet, again, thou tellest me a strange thing—that on this man, Time leaves no imprint of its passage; whereby I know that, to the record of his years, Yáma has ceased to make the annual addition; but the wherefore I cannot tell."

Then the lady, whose curiosity was only stimulated by what the priest had told her, at once determined that, when her own leaf was turned down, she would lose no time in asking Yáma the reason why Ting's had been left; and, hinting to Sam-Su that she might probably have a communication to make subsequent to that event, she made a liberal offering to the pious purposes fund at the monastery, picked up her fan, and returned to the city.

Now, whether it was owing to anxiety to satisfy herself, or for any less praiseworthy reason, will perhaps never be known; but, very shortly after the interview with the learned priest on the White Cloud Mountains, Mrs. Ting's own leaf *was* turned down, and, for the twelfth time in his life, Ting was a widower.

Six months passed, yet no message came from the lady to enlighten the good man at the monastery. Sam-Su—for the story was told in the refectory whence it trickled out into the town—had decided that celestial occupations had left no room for earthly fancies—when lo! in a vision of the night, Mrs. Ting appeared to him, impatient to unburden herself of the news.

"There had been such a press at the 'gates,'" she said, "that she was kept waiting outside for weeks; and after getting through, the crowd in front was so great that she had only just succeeded in obtaining audience of Yáma."

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"'Most dread One,' I cried, 'I am the wife of Ching Ting the ivory carver. Twelve wives has he carried to the 'house in the valley,' and I, who stand before thee, am the last.

"'Seven generations have ruled in the city since Ting opened his eyes, and, lo! an eighth is springing up, and of all men of his year Ting only is left. Tell me now, I pray thee, why Ching Ting, whose years go back to

The holy man considered profoundly for awhile.

the fifth of Kwong Si, is living on the earth after all of his generation are with the spirits of their fathers.

"'Dear me!' exclaimed Yáma. 'Really! it's very forgetful of me. I remember now. One hundred and thirty years ago, I was extra busy; and, while turning over the leaves of my Book rather rapidly, one that was badly stitched fell out. It was nearly filled up; and having no time to paste it in then, I slipped it between the covers, and there it's been ever since. Now, I shouldn't wonder if that doesn't turn out to be Ting's!' —which sure enough it did.

"'Well,' said Yáma, pasting the leaf in its place. 'I'll finish this job now at once,' and filling up the page, he turned down the leaf."

"It was just at that moment," said Lum Yu, who told the tale, "that Ching Ting received his summons."

H. Hunter.

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THE EMPRESS OF THE EARTH

THE TALE OF THE YELLOW WAR

BY M. P. SHIEL.

SUMMARY.

Yen How, a shrewd Chino-Japanese doctor, falls desperately in love with Ada Seward, an English nursemaid. His advances are rudely repulsed, however; but he leaves England with a fixed determination to win the object of his affections in spite of all opposition.

Yen How goes first to Japan as a Japanese, where he becomes intimate with the prime minister, Marquis Ito, to whom he proposes a league between the two races of China and Japan, and an immense scheme by which Europe may be reduced to a waste, and China become the Empress of the Earth with scarcely an effort of her own. He then goes to China and becomes virtual ruler of that nation. In the course of a conversation which he has with Li Hung Chang he unfolds his scheme for setting all the European Powers against Great Britain. After the slaughter China will step in and conquer the remnants of the armies.

War is declared between Great Britain and France and Germany and Russia. The British fleet meets the Allied ships in Mid-channel and a battle ensues. Although the British vessels are outnumbered by two to one, the superior tactics of the British, and of John Hardy, a consumptive midshipman and a genius for modern warfare (who escapes on the *Jupiter* from the fight, and rams all the transports some distance away), result in the destruction of the Allied fleet. Hardy is ill for a time, and on his recovery decides to go to China. Before going, however, he endeavours to obtain a promise of marriage from Miss Bosey Jay, a young lady artist, but is refused. He goes to the Palace Theatre of Varieties, and there meets Ada Seward, the nursemaid with whom Yen How is in love. She sends him home intoxicated, and a week later he is in Paris, where he has a row with Edropol, the Bulgarian duellist. John, however, does not fight, but goes to Berlin, and from thence to Petersburg. Here he sends a letter to Bobbie, his old servant in England, and starts out for China by the overland route. Yen How organises an army of 400,000,000 souls—men, women, and children—to overrun Europe when the time is ripe. He is sitting in his garden when the capture of John Hardy is announced to him.

John is brought before Yen and they quarrel. The former fires at the Chinaman, but the bullet strikes a breast-plate of steel and does no harm. John is seized and thrown into prison. Meanwhile, the British China squadron, failing to obtain the promised assistance from Japan, engages the Allied fleet, and defeats it, but at a cost of all the ships but three, which are shortly afterwards chased and attacked by the Japanese fleet. Affairs now assume a serious aspect in Europe, and the British rout the Germans at New Brandenburg with a loss of 150,000 men. Foo-chee loves Ah-lin (who are in the same Chinese regimental company), but the latter is loved by Sin-wan, a warder of the Imperial Prison.

CHAPTER XVII. (*continued*).

The Imperial prison stood—and stands still—in a great quadrangle of marble, fringed with stupendous avenues of long-haired trees of the banyan *genus*, being surrounded by a moat bridged by a number of marble bridges. The building itself is of marble, and of very great size. A stone's throw to the south stood the palace of the Austrian Ambassador, embedded in a bower of foliage; to the north, a hundred yards away, and separated from it by a lake overgrown with huge slumbering lilies and moon-leaved water-growths, stood the shaded palace of Yen How. The Imperial Palace itself was half a mile away by the broad avenue which stretched to its portals, but there was also a secret short-cut to it from the palace of Yen How.

It was the quiet hour of the evening-time, and the sumptuous landscape of the Imperial City seemed to faint and doze in a dream of lotus peace.

Leaning over one of the marble bridges that spanned the prison moat was an old man. It was Ni-ching-tang, the father of Foo-chee, one of the innumerable scullions who did duty in Yen How's kitchen. His day's work was over, and he was looking sleepily upon the dark and slumbrous water of the moat.

As he leant so, Sin-wan approached him hurriedly, passing across to his duties in the prison. Ni-ching-tang would not have heard the noiseless tread of the thick-felted slippers of Sin-wan; but Sin-wan spoke.

"Give good to you, Ni-ching-tang," he said. "Has his Might, the Governor, passed this way yet?"

"No, Sin-wan," the old man answered, and his eyes smiled, "fear nothing. He will not know."

"Know what, Ni-ching-tang?"

"That you are late—again."

Sin-wan leered.

"It comes of going to seek a little wife," he said.

"Pooh! it is nothing—if you are not seen. But a wife?"

"Ah-lin is her name, and she is the daughter of Lan-chaw-sing and Nan-lin, his wife. We will marry this moon. She is well formed both in face and body."

"What, with small feet too?"

"No small feet: but well formed in face and body."

"And she lives where?"

"In the third quarter, and the main street."

"Why, I have a son who lives near the main street of the third quarter."

"And what is your son's name, Ni-ching-tang?"

Sin-wan did not notice that Ni-ching-tang paused the merest fraction of a second before he answered.

"My son is called Cheng-lu," he said.

Then Sin-wan passed on, and entered the prison.

As he went in, descended some stairs, and walked along a dark corridor, he took from his bosom a small cylinder of ebony, round which clung a roll of silk-paper.

On the paper were six lines of writing, each starting from the top and going down to the bottom. Each line started with a date, and underneath the date came the instructions for that day.

This document had been painted by Yen How, with his own hands.

Yen How had stood over John Hardy, with watch and stethoscope in his hands. John had lain bound on his back on the marble floor.

Yen How had examined him from head to foot. He had felt the texture of his muscles, had palpated the calves of his legs, had held his pulse, watch in hand. He had applied the stethoscope to John's chest, and heard the wheeze; he had laid it over his heart, and made an estimate of the exact *timbre* of the beats, systole and diastole, veinous and arterial.

When it was all over, he knew the precise truth about John Hardy's vitality, its quantity, its intensity, its whole diathesis. He knew just how much mental and physical torture the lad could bear, and for how long, without an actual cessation of life.

He was not in a hurry. He waited—John was well fed and nourished. It was over a week before the torture began.

Now, when Sin-wan opened the door behind which John lay in sleep, Ada Seward would no longer have recognized the pretty boy who had sat beside her in the music-hall, nor Bosey Jay the gallant fellow who had made her throb in an alarm of self-retention.

Broad streaks of absolute white mingled with his long fair hair. His bony hands clutched and trembled in his sleep like the hands of some aged miser.

At the first faint sound of the key in the door, he sprang with a bound straight to his feet, wide awake. He had learnt to be afraid now.

Sin-wan, as he turned the key, muttered something to two men who were now with him. They went away up a narrow stairway into a room above. Sometimes Sin-wan could fulfil his instructions alone; sometimes he needed auxiliaries. To-day he needed them, but not in the same room with him.

He gave a final glance at the directions under Day IV. on the silken scroll, and with studious brow ran over the points on his fingers. This was the ninth scroll of the kind, all covering a space of six days, with which Sin-wan had been entrusted.

Having satisfied himself that all was ready, and his instructions well in his head, Sin-wan entered the chamber and closed the door behind him.

The sight of that face had become a pang and a sickness to the soul of John Hardy. To all his tortures it was an added torture. It grinned in his nightmares. It was the devil of his Hades.

He sank back in a corner, pale as death.

Sin-wan never brought him his food; so that Sin-wan's face was associated in his mind only with agony. Yen How, who knew the Mind, and its secrets, had willed it so.

The room was not very small, but it was of stone, and damp. However, in one corner was a bed which was nothing less than luxurious, the coverings being of fine, padded silk. John Hardy had not suffered from cold; still less from hunger or thirst.

These were tortures far and away too elementary and obvious to occur to such a mind as that of Yen How. The body, by itself, is capable of intense pangs; but never is torture exquisite when it is wholly divorced from the mind.

Yen How's profound knowledge of this fact was proved when he said to himself:

"One of his tortures shall consist in the daily sight of —a Face."

Beside the quilted bed, there were in the chamber a table, on which was water and wine; near it, a cushioned chair; and a stool made of a hard, greenish-coloured wood, provided with a straight upright back, and cross-pieces in the legs. It could not be moved. It was cramped by iron rivets to the flooring.

The room was lighted by three Chinese-lanterns which hung above John Hardy's reach, and were lighted through holes in the ceiling near them.

Sometimes one, or two, or even the three went out, through some carelessness of the attendants; and even when they all burnt, there was not much light from them. But John's eyes had long since grown accustomed to the obscurity. He saw everything clearly.

One of the ingenuities of pain to which he had been subjected consisted in the mere appearance of Sin-wan without any sort of subsequent action on the man's part. Once Sin-wan had entered, leered round the room, and retired. The next day he entered, leered round the room, and retired. Was the ordeal over, then? A heavenly hope leapt in John Hardy. The next day Sin-wan appeared with a brazier crowded with white-hot wires.

Several times lately Sin-wan had entered, leered round, and retired. With every new entrance now, John hoped that on *this* day no new sword would pierce him. For to-morrow he cared not—only for *this* day his spirit cried to Heaven. But on many a day Heaven turned her ear from him.

He breathed in an agony of Hope, in an Arctic hell of Fear.

In the course of weeks his great mind had quite collapsed. He was now utterly demoralised and craven.

He knew neither morning nor night. He had lost count of the days and the weeks.

He did not commit suicide, because, at first, the means were not ready at his hand. It is not an easy matter for a man to dash his brains out against a wall. Later, when he looked round for the means to kill himself, an intense cowardice seized him. He clung desperately to life—only to life. Just one little spark, too, of his innate stubbornness lingered within him. After a torture, he would pray aloud that Heaven would send its swift Messenger upon him; but his obstinate will to live returned, if a day of peace were granted him.

Now, as Sin-wan showed his face, he cringed close against the wall with staring eyes of expectancy.

Was this a day of torture? or a day of grace?

What added a touch of intensest horror to the relation between this boy and this man was the fact that they had never exchanged a word. They were as remote and divided as two creatures of different planets. Sin-wan did not know a word of English, nor John a word of Chinese.

A day of torture, or of grace? He had ceased to care for the morrow; but *to-day* . . . !

A wild hope stabbed his heart. Sin-wan had no sort of implement about him. He could not torture without an implement. It was a day of—grace, then?

No. The Chinaman walked to the corner in which lay the cords with which John was usually bound. And he lifted them on his forearm, and he came to where John, half standing, half falling, cowered.

John had long ceased to make any sort of resistance to the binding process to which he was subjected by the brawny arms of Sin-wan.

During the operation this time he fainted. But terror woke him. He was placed on the high-backed stool, his arms bound behind the back, and his chest, high up to the neck, upon it. Underneath, his shoeless feet were bound to the cross-pieces.

He could not move his head backward, for the chair-back prevented him; forward he could move it about fifteen degrees, and from side to side about thirty.

What was in store for him? He was wide awake now. With starting eye-balls he waited.

Five minutes passed.

Then Sin-wan put his hand into his bosom, and drew out something.

It was a leather strap, about three and a half inches broad, and about sixteen long. At the ends were clasps.

He put it round John Hardy's neck, and clasped it. And now John could move his head neither backward, forward, nor sideways.

He sat with elevated chin, staring—a gaze of horror into vacancy. Yet he felt no pain.

He waited five more minutes, and the dim thought that reeled within his brain in a vertigo of woe was this: How long, how long, O Lord?

Five minutes, and then five more: and then he felt—something.

Yet it gave him no pain.

It was a drop of fluid—water, in fact—which had fallen upon his head from above.

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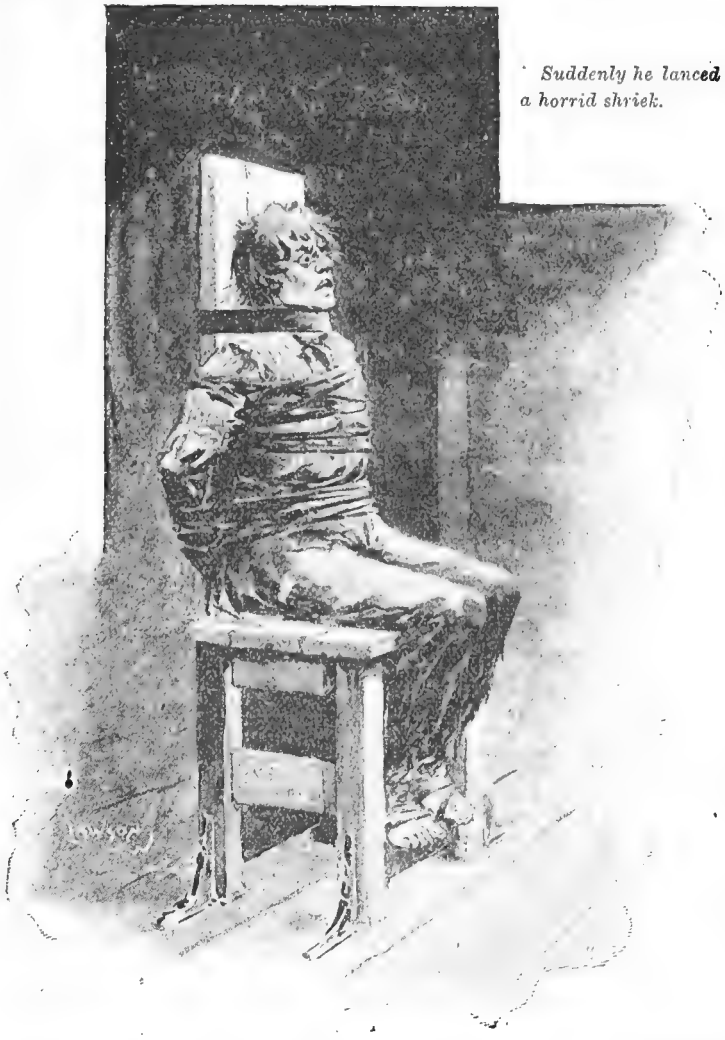

Suddenly he lanced a horrid shriek.

He waited half a minute, and it came again; and half a minute, and it came again. And so, regularly, every half minute it came for some ten minutes.

This, of itself, to an ordinary person, would be a misery. But by this time John Hardy was so familiarised with agony, that to him it was simply nothing. The slowly-dropping water collected on his head, and was trickling down his face, when he began to wonder, with a species of glad incredulity, whether this could be meant as a new torture.

He could have borne it all the night, and all the day, and thanked God for his clemency.

Suddenly he lanced a horrid shriek.

A drop of something else had fallen upon his head, and eaten into his scalp. It was a drop of strong oil of vitriol.

Would the falling of the vitriol continue? or the falling of the water?

The next drop was a drop of water.

But if it had been vitriol, and vitriol thenceforth regularly, John Hardy's agonies would have been far less acute than, in fact, they were.

In this was manifested the profundity of Yen How, that he knew how exquisitely to intensify the pangs of the body by means of the travail of the soul.

The next drop was water, and the next was water, and the next was water, and the next was—vitriol!

And now John Hardy cried out against Heaven, straining at his cords, and bawling like a bull.

But drop by drop from the ceiling fell the implacable fluid; not so many drops of water, and then a drop of vitriol, but with crafty variations, sometimes two drops of vitriol at a time, and then for minutes, not another.

Yen How, however, knew his craft too well to make such an ordeal last very long. Sin-wan had instructions that, as soon as the victim showed signs of madness or collapse, the torture should end.

Accordingly, when John Hardy ceased to cry aloud, and a red stream from his mouth trickled down his chin, his bands were undone, and Sin-wan cast his unconscious body on the bed.

* * * *

Just about the time that he did so, Ah-lin was standing before the incense-stick booth of Foo-Chee.

"It is not that I am bold, Foo-chee," she said, "that I come here to speak. But I must say what I have in my mind."

Here was blessedness, and a wringing of the hands, and an embarrassment of the pleased eyelids, and the favour of the upper gods, for Foo-chee.

"It is an incense-stick that you desire," he said, "and your name is Ah-lin, for I know it. And all the incense-sticks which I have are yours. For why? Because we stand and step together each day before sundown in the same company of the drilled—no other reason."

"It is a lie, Foo-chee," said Ah-lin, "there is another reason—though I cannot guess what it can be. But whatever the reason be, you must now throw it quite away. It was not for an incense-stick that I came—though incense-sticks are pleasant, and I have long desired one—but to tell you just that. You must throw it quite away."

"And for why?"

"Because another, who is greater than you, wants just the thing that you want. If you get that thing, he will kill you. In order that he may not kill you, he shall have the thing."

"Cruel, Ah-lin!"

"No, not I. You say what is not, not knowing, Foo-Chee. But he will kill you; therefore he shall have what you desire."

"Then I shall kill myself, not having what I desire."

"Cruel, Foo-chee!"

"You will feel happy if I live, Ah-lin?"

"Yes; and, therefore, I shall make myself feel unhappy by giving to another what you desire, in order that I may feel happy at the same time in knowing that you live."

"To feel happy and unhappy at the same time is mixed, Ah-lin."

"But it is better, Foo-chee, to feel happy and unhappy for a little hour, and then die."

Here was the practicality of the woman. Foo-chee pondered over it. Then he lifted his head and said:

"There is a riddle somewhere which I cannot solve, Ah-lin. Let us go, instead, to the eating-house of Hing-Chang-Li for a meal, with fresh tea. And with you take three of these incense-sticks."

Ah-lin hesitated, and was lost. Foo-chee drew down the

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flap over his booth, and carefully adjusted the ring to the staple; then together they walked off on their heels; and their swinging pig-tails met and touched, as it were, knowingly behind them.

And at the eating-house of Hing-Chang-Li they ate a hearty meal, with a whole *mitin* of fresh tea-leaves.

They were in the sweep of the force which underlies the world. It was the doing of the upper gods.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Chinese Iron.

The next day John Hardy, at the hour of evening, sat in his corner watching his door with a kind of wild-beast sullenness.

His nerves had an instinct of the hour when Sin-wan was due to appear.

So sick was his soul with misery after the ordeal of the

He ran now, with the stealthy feet of a man treading on hot embers.

day before, that he had eaten nothing since. His food lay untasted on the table.

He sat sprawling with extended limbs on the floor, watching the point of Sin-wan's expected entrance through the fierce and sullen corners of his eyes.

He had often had the thought of braining Sin-wan with one of the porcelain platters in which his food was left, or of strangling him with his pig-tail, or one of the ropes used to bind himself. As he sat there, the thought now recurred to him. His brain was in that condition in which thoughts are no longer semi-voluntary, but seem to come and go at random of their own motion, like the winds through the vacant heavens. He had, however, sufficient reason left to give no entertainment to this thought of attacking Sin-wan. His chance, if he ever had it, was long past. He was too hopelessly frail now.

He sat long, expecting. One of his lanterns went out; then another; in half-an-hour the third. He was in darkness.

Suddenly the lad started as though a sword had pierced him.

He looked eagerly towards the door; and then he said to himself: "No, no." It was too incredible; he must be mad.

"Mad, mad," he moaned, his head buried in his two arms, as he rocked himself slowly to and fro, with a regular motion like a pendulum. So he went on for about half-an-hour, his face hidden, with sometimes a moan, and sometimes a word. "What have I done?" he said wearily, in the thinnest whine: "What have I done—oh God, Father, God? . . . But now I am mad, mad . . ."

It had seemed to him as the third lantern went out, and left him in darkness, that at the edge of the door there was a long streak of semi-light—*that the door was open!*.

He had sense enough to know that the condition of his mind was one far and away removed from a state of ordinary sanity; and that his senses were, now, quite capable of playing him tricks. But when, after a long time, he lifted up his head, there, still before his eyes, was the streak of light.

He sprang to his feet, and his pallor of death assumed a hue of even more absolute wanness. Groping limpingly along the walls, he made toward the door. But, on the whole, it was rather to assure himself of the optical illusion which he supposed, than with the expectation of finding the door really open, that he proceeded.

But the door was really open.

What made his heart go bumping and bounding within his ribs was the look of Providence—the hint of God's finger—in the fact of the lanterns *all* going out at the same time, when, by some extraordinary means, the door had become unfastened.

But though one step meant salvation, and one instant's delay meant death, yet he could not take the step. The sudden shock of hope—the sudden suspicion of Heaven—all but killed him. He dropped back against the wall, panting, panting, trying with his right hand to force back the violent galloping of his heart.

But the instant that he could move, he moved. With wide mouth and gasping chest, he cautiously pushed back the door and passed through it.

Toward what? Toward certain capture? It must not be supposed that he was now in a mental condition to give the question even a single thought. He went through the open door precisely in the way in which a wild animal passes through the open door of its cage—instinctively toward liberty. He lived by moments. At *this* moment he was free; to the next moment he gave not a thought. He simply walked forward as a stream flows downwards—because it is a law of Nature.

He found himself in a long corridor; and yonder, halfway down the corridor was—a man.

The man's back was turned toward John; and he was bending down, cleaning a blue-glass lantern.

It was at this sight that the first notion of the impossibility of his ultimate escape occurred to John Hardy; and, with this appreciation of the impossibility, came also the ravenous Desire, the frenzied Hope. As he slid swiftly back behind the door, and drew it upon himself, he was no longer a mere wild creature of instinct. He looked forward—he reasoned.

He waited, fearing worse than death to stir the door. Then he had a sudden horror which pricked him like a goad to action—if Sin-wan came? It was his hour!

He very slightly pushed back the door, and peeped out. The corridor was empty.

He ran now, with the stealthy feet of a man treading on hot embers. His feet were bare, and made no sound. He had on a shirt and a pair of trousers. But the shirt was filthy, and the trousers flapped in long rags all down his legs. His hair reached to his shoulders.

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At the end of the corridor was a door. He pushed it lightly. It did not move. He forced his shoulder against it. It was locked.

He was as much a prisoner as before, then? Immediately after the first intolerable sinking of the heart, he could not believe it. A vague, but real, faith was in him now. The mere fact that he was where he was proved Providence. He believed, dimly, that God, now, was willing him to be free, wild as the idea was, far off as the probability might be.

He looked swiftly round for some means of escape; and, there, sure enough, was a tall window in the side of the corridor, slightly open.

He ran to it, and looked down. It opened on to another corridor twenty feet below.

Twenty feet! The distance was infinite.

Underneath the flapping rags of his trousers one could see the red and livid patchwork of his flesh, where it had been nipped, and pinched, and burnt, and pricked, and bruised in half a hundred agonies. How could he leap twenty feet? It was as dreadful to him as to an infant. Like the very aged, he was afraid "of that which is high."

But as he looked again he saw a short rope hanging over the window-sill by which he could help himself down.

And now, at this sight, it is a wonder that some suspicion of the fact that all these happy chances were only part of another elaborate torture did not enter his head. But his brain was so pre-occupied with the idea of *Providence*, that nothing of the sort occurred to him.

With endless pains he managed, with the help of the rope, to reach the lower corridor, and at once, with the same stealthy trepidation, he set out, running, in the same direction in which he had so far come.

At the end of this corridor also was a door; and at his push it opened.

Now he was in yet another corridor, at right angles to the first and second. In which direction should he turn? He did not care. He would be guided right by the Hand that led him. Away to the right he went, with tottering gait, treading on embers, hugging the wall.

If only his heart would cease its awful thumping! Surely, surely, through all that vast building, through all Pekin, they would hear the echoes of that labouring bosom! So it seemed to him.

His white, wide lips were twisted awry in his effort to take in and expel his noisy breath.

As he ran along in this excess of agitation, he suddenly remembered the battle of Shoreham, how he had been cool in the midst of sounding cannon and angry war. Could he not still be so? Was he so much changed? He made a weak effort—a faint self-assertion of the old John Hardy. But in another instant he forgot the effort. It was far from him.

He reached the end of the corridor, and was about to turn to the left, when, there before, him, he saw two Chinamen, near to him, talking. They were standing in the middle of the passage which he had to pass.

Had they seen him? Had they heard the labour of his heart? Apparently not: they remained deep in talk.

Must he lurk still till they moved away? Would they not come his way?

Suddenly, behind him, down the length of the corridor in which he stood, he heard a faint sound. He looked and saw a man approaching him. He was between two dangers.

The man's eyes were bent meditatively upon the ground. He came swinging toward John Hardy.

The night had not yet come, though it was near. The corridor in which the two conversed was not dark, but it was much dimmer than that in which John stood. It was necessary for him to move—the third man was coming near.

He stole forward, inch by inch, sideways, with his chest against the wall, and his face twisted round, watching the two talkers. He came near them—he was opposite to them—by a stretched out arm they could touch him.

Stealthily he crept, slowly as the movement of a glacier; he was past them. And he was no sooner past them than, with incautious haste, eager only to be on—to be on—he sped away. During those instants of slow motion he had passed through all the terrors of the grave.

The man's eyes were bent meditatively upon the ground.

The two men calmly continued their talk; the third came up and joined them. John Hardy went onwards undisturbed.

For quite half-an-hour he stole forward, all fears and tremors, like a thief in the night, through three halls, over a courtyard, along two more corridors, without anywhere meeting anyone.

The slumbrous gloaming deepened. He began to think himself lost in this endless structure, without hope of finding an exit.

But at last he saw an oblong of distinctly lesser obscurity; he knew that this must be a door of exit from the prison.

Could it be true? Was he really about to escape into the open day—under the sky, the clouds? He leapt forward. And as he did so, a man stood in the doorway, and leant his back against the door-post.

It was far from light now, but John Hardy would have felt the presence of that form and face in the darkest midnight. It was Sin-wan.

John was still in full career to make for the door, when his eyes fell upon this man; and, like a shying horse, he bolted aside. A door, as he touched the wall, gave way before his pressure. He rushed through, mad to put a world of distance between him and that face. As he hastened forward, in the dark now, he stepped upon nothing, and tumbled headlong down a flight of stone stairs.

He had hardly time to pick himself up when he knew that someone was behind him, slowly descending the stairs, humming a tune. And he knew that it was Sin-wan.

Off he rushed again; and again, in five minutes there was light. He stood between two walls about five feet apart, about ten feet long; and, at the end of them, was a portal, painted green, half open; and beyond the portal, he saw—trees!

He was free! and yet he shuddered. Behind him was Sin-wan, coming, coming; and before him, the open gate; but the whole of the space between him and the gate, and between the two walls, was paved with broken glass.

There was not an inch of harmless ground upon which to place his naked feet.

But Sin-wan was behind. He stepped forward, and reached the gate, and passed through it, running.

Every footprint which he left behind was a footprint of blood.

Still onward, panting heart! The hand with which He leads is surely rough—but still, is He not leading?

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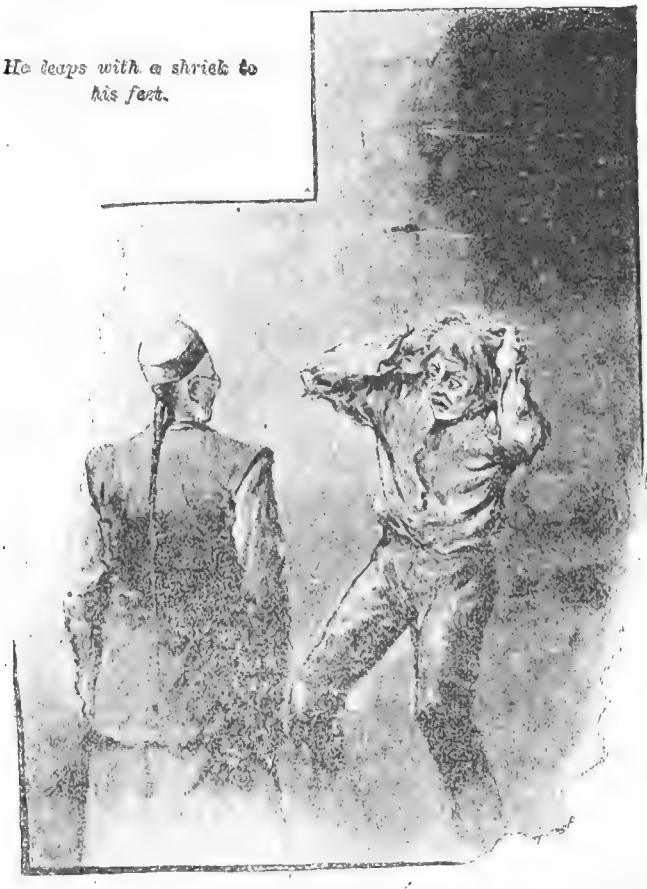

He leaps with a shriek to his feet.

And now for the bridge of marble ahead which spans the moat. He reaches it, and starts, and stops.

There, in the middle of the bridge, leaning over the parapet, looking at the water, is a man.

This gauntlet also John must run. Crouching against the opposite parapet, he crawls forward.

His lust to be free is now a thousand thousand times more intense than ever before. Every danger that he has so far escaped has added to his terror a deeper terror, and to his hope a wilder frenzy. Like a beast, he crawls forward on hands and knees, step by step, without a sound.

But just as he is exactly opposite the man, the man turns quite round. John Hardy leaps to his feet. They are face to face, and eye to eye.

All is over then. He has been seen.

But no! What means those groping hands, that hesitating step, as the man turns slowly away? Is he *blind?* Can those eyes see *nothing?* So John Hardy believes. Here at least, is Providence, and the leading hand.

Away, once more, toward the palace of Yen How, and then down the long avenues to the portal of the "Imperial City." This part of the way he remembers, having passed through it before. Onward, in the shade of the great trees he limps, leaving behind him his trail of blood. He meets no one. He is under the open sky, among the leaves sighs the evening wind.

He reaches the great portal, and, strange to say, there is no one there to bar his exit. He passes out. He is in an open space—beyond the Imperial walls—which properly belongs to the "Chinese City."

So far he has escaped. A strange feeling of security rushes upon him, and, with it, an overwhelming, speechless gratitude. He drops to his knees, his face turns upward in an ecstatic agony of love to the skies, washed in tears, out stretch his arms in adoration.

But between his eyes and the sky comes a face, and between his stretched-out arms comes a form. He leaps with a shriek to his feet, recognises the face of Yen How, and faints in Yen How's arms.

The slightest possible smile wrinkled the corners of Yen How's eyes.

"Pooh!" he said in English, "it is nothing. Why such a cry as that? It is your own fault, boy. You ought to have known that Providence—if there is such a thing—never works in these outright ways. Yen How's providence does—but Yen How is a smaller fellow altogether than the Big Ones above—if He is there at all. Is He there? Is He there? Ah!—may be, and may be not. But just now it is Yen How for you, and not He. The man cleaning the lanterns, and the two men talking together, and Sin-wan, and the blind man—they all saw you, you know, boy, because Yen How put them there to see you. And it is hard to escape from Yen How, whose Ada Seward you have kissed, and whom you have tried to shoot lillee white boy. And Yen How is not done with you yet—not yet—not yet. But those English!"—here he ceased to speak to the unconscious form in his arms, and continued his meditative soliloquy in Chinese—"those English! They are just like devils for fighting! Only 150 or 200 of them, they say, at Kiao-chau, and six weeks gone, and they not killed off yet. Stupid Japanese ship-captains to let them get away in that fashion. However—ah, lillee English kisser,"—he addressed John Hardy again—"wouldn't you like to be with the 200 white men at Kiao-chau now? I think you might be able to play some tricks with their help, too. But Yen How has you tight—Yen How the toad, the frog, eh? Stop, though, isn't there something in your Bible about a plague of frogs in the land of Egypt in the Pharaoh's time? Yes, surely,—yes. Well, now, how would you like a little plague of frogs in your land of England, eh? Ah, well, it is near. It is not far off now. . . . ."

At this point a man appeared; Yen How handed him the limp body of John Hardy, and walked up and down a long time that night under the shade of the trees of the Imperial avenues.

About this time there were two men outside the Imperial precincts who ought to have been within them. One was Sin-wan, and the other was the father of Foo-chee, Ni-ching-tang.

Ni-ching-tang went to the dwelling of his son Foo-chee, whom he loved, in order that he might see Foo-chee, and receive from him the reverences due to a father. And, lo! Foo-chee was not there; and Foo-chee's booth was deserted.

Said Ni-ching-tang:

"Now, where can Foo-chee be?"

Sin-wan went to the dwelling of his promised wife, Ah-lin, to see her, and receive from her the reverences due to a husband that is to be. And, lo! Ah-lin was not there.

So Sin-wan said:

"Now, where can Ah-lin be?"

Now, Ni-ching-tang was shrewd, and Sin-wan was shrewd. So Sin-wan said:

"Ah-lin is not far from the booth of Foo-chee."

And Ni-ching-tang said:

"He who knows how to find Ah-lin is far on the road to the discovery of Foo-chee."

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And Sin-wan set out to go to the booth of Foo-chee, and Ni-ching-tang to go the dwelling of Ah-lin. And midway between the dwelling of Ah-lin and the booth of Foo-chee, these two men met in the street. It was Ni-ching-tang who spoke.

"Ho! ho!—late hours—late hours," he said (and he half hid his face behind a sportive hand)—"late hours, and a merry courting-time."

Sin-wan was struck dumb. Ni-ching-tang knew that Sin-wan had no right to be out of bounds at this time, but Sin-wan did not know that Ni-ching-tang had no right.

"A merry courting-time?" said Sin-wan at last; "but it is not so with me, Ni-ching-tang."

"Well, after all, pleasure is pleasant to feel," answered Ni-ching-tang, still harping on the same string; "and they will not know in the prison, Sin-wan, for who will tell them?"

"Pleasure is pleasant to feel, yes," said Sin-wan; "but it is not pleasure which I am feeling now, Ni-ching-tang."

"And why not, Sin-wan?"

"Because Ah-lin, of whom I told you, is away from her home; and my mind is telling me that she is making someone else happy instead of me."

"Ho! that is bad. And who is that someone, Sin-wan?"

"He is called Foo-chee."

"Soh! And you are now looking for Ah-lin?—I see."

"I am looking for Foo-chee."

"And for why?"

"To kill him."

"Soh! to kill Foo-chee. Well, that is the only way. But has Foo-chee no brother, no father, who will kill you back again?"

"I do not know."

"With keen tortures?"

"Poh! I do not think of that."

"With dreadful agonies of the brain and the liver, Sin-wan?"

"No! I do not think of that. He is a botherless dog, a seller of incense-sticks."

"Well—well, do your will, Sin-wan. It is the only way. As for me, I am not feeling happy, too. I have a son, who has an enemy. And I am going to look for my son now, that I may hear from him whether it will be necessary for me to kill his enemy or no."

"Well, then, may you do well, Ni-ching-tang."

"And you, may you do well, Sin-wan."

And so they parted. But they neither of them found Ah-lin and Foo-chee that night; for they did not think of looking into the eating-house of Hing-Chang-Li, where the two young people again were that night.

So Sin-wan and Ni-ching-tang hurried back, both of them, to the Imperial precincts, making an inward vow that on the next night they would procure more time, and do better. *(To be continued.)*

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THE SECRET.

The room is in darkness save for the light of a shaded lamp. In the white bed lies a woman—a woman young and beautiful. Seated by the bedside are two men—the woman's husband and the doctor. The husband has watched there for three nights without sleep.

The doctor rises and feels the woman's pulse. While his hand is on her wrist the husband anxiously scans his face.

"Well, doctor?—Well?"

For answer the doctor shakes his head.

"No hope?"

"No hope."

"Heaven have mercy!"

"She may perhaps regain consciousness for a short time before the end; there may be—there often is—a final rally. Meanwhile, I fear I can do nothing. Perhaps you would rather that I left you?"

"No; stay."

The doctor walks to the end of the room and looks out of the window into the night.

The husband covers his face with his hands, and thinks. This young life that was now ebbing away—had it, so far as he was concerned, been happy? Had he anything to reproach himself with?—No. Thank Heaven! Everything that she had asked for, she had received. He had lavished riches on her—he had lost friends for her—he had given up his little ambition for her. He had lived for her—been her slave, and people had laughed at him for it. No man had loved her—could have loved her—as he had. Perhaps the fact that he had not gained her easily, had made him treasure her the more. For he had had to teach her to love him.

When first he had asked for her, she had said she could not love him. But gradually her feelings softened toward him. Trouble came upon her family. He allowed her poverty to make no difference to him. He asked for her once more, and this time she consented. Only a few months ago she had told him, what he had never known before, that she had, for the sake of marrying him, broken off a secret engagement to another. That drew him still closer to her. And now he and she, who loved one another so well, are to say good-bye for ever. He prays Heaven to grant him one little favour, and that is that she may speak to him just once more. It would at least make parting easier for him.

* * * * *

Suddenly a long-drawn sigh from the bed, and the woman sits up. He eyes slowly open, and she stares straight before her.

In a moment the husband is at her side, and he clasps her hand firmly within his, as though he would by force prevent her leaving him. Then he puts his arm gently round her neck and kisses her tenderly upon her forehead. But, as his lips touch her, she shudders through her whole frame with fearful quivering, and pushes him from her, as though he were something repulsive.

"Roy!" she cries, "Roy! Where are you?"

The man at the window starts as though shot, and clutches nervously at the curtain.

"Roy! my darling!"

At this the doctor slowly turns and moves towards the door.

"Should you require me," he says huskily, his eyes fixed strangely upon the slender figure upon the bed, "I am in the next room."

The husband bows, and the doctor passes unsteadily out—not into the next room, but into the street.

"Roy! Roy! Oh, why don't you come, Roy?"

The husband's name is not Roy.

"Loved one, here I am, your husband—darling, kiss me." And again he leans over her, and again she shudders, more fearfully than before, and again she pushes him from her.

The man is dumb now. Once more she speaks.

"Oh, Roy, do come! He is keeping you from me, I know he is! I am dying, Roy! Oh, come—come! I want you to say that you forgive me, Roy. We have met so often and you have never spoken about our—they forced me to marry him, Roy. Oh, dear, darling Roy, do come! For I have never loved him, Roy—never loved him." Then more loudly still, "Never loved him." And then there is another sigh, and she falls back and then there is silence.

* * * * *

Out in the darkness a man stumbles blindly along, and passers-by who know him wonder if it is possible that the usually grave and dignified Dr. Leroy Jennings is intoxicated.

* * * * *

The room is in darkness save for the light of a shaded lamp. In the white bed lies a woman—a woman young and beautiful, from whose tired body a soul, freed at last from its torturing burden, has winged its way into eternity. A sudden rush of air through the slightly raised window causes the light to flicker, gasp, expire. All is dark now. "Never loved me!" sobs the man at the bedside. "Never loved me!"

Frank Hillmore.

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Here are a number of little verses with the last line in each missing. A Prize of One Guinea will be sent to the person who supplies the greatest number of what we consider to be the best.

All you have to do is to take a sheet of paper, put down the figure corresponding to the verse, and write alongside of it the line you think would be the most appropriate.

Then attach your name and address, inclose the slip in an envelope marked "Verselet," and post it to the Editor of *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, W.C., to arrive not later than Wednesday, April 13th.

A copy of any book the winner may care to name will be presented to each of the next best twenty-five.

1.

There was an old man of Rheims,
Who was troubled with horrible dreams,
So they fed him on cake
To keep him awake,
.....

2.

There was a young lady so gaily
Went off to see Barnum and Bailey,
But she gave a loud shriek
When she met the first freak,
.....

3.

A girl in a moment of pique
Gave her lover a slap on the chique.
Not a word did he say,
But he left her that day,
.....

4.

There was a young cook in a kitchen
Whose smile was so sweet and bewitchin',
That policeman astray
Were proposing all day,
.....

5.

There was an old man from Peru
Who had nothing whatever to do;
So free from all care
In foul weather or fair,
.....

6.

There was a young scorcher of Ham,
Who full speed on his bike used to cram,
But he's no scorcher now,
For fate is to plough,
.....

7.

There was an old man who said naught
When people all stared at his wart;
But he grinned with such glee,
They grew frightened of he,
.....

8.

Said the Reverend Henry Ward Beecher
To a hen: "You're a beautiful creature."
And the hen, pleased at that,
Laid an egg in his hat,
.....

9.

There was a young person of London,
Whose elegant shoe-string came undone;
But she said, with a smile,
Some men walk a mile,
.....

10.

There was a young lady of Troy,
Whom several large flies did annoy.
Some she drowned at the pump,
Some she killed with a thump,
.....

11.

There was an old maid of Havanner,
Who steadily thumped her pianner,
Till the neighbours with glee
Abolished she,
.....

12.

There was an old man of Vienna,
Who lived upon tincture of senna.
When that did not agree,
He took camomile tea,
.....

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A TALE OF OLD FRANCE.

By MARY FERMOR.

SUMMARY.

Amaury Montruel, a knight, and Mahmoud-el-Reis, a Saracen, meet on the road to Paris. The former's mission is to kill the Queen of France; the latter's to kill the King. At the same time two children, Eric and Eve, are on their way to Paris to aid the Queen, and overhear the conversation of these two horsemen. Shortly afterwards a knight and his page give the children a lift on the road, and, on arriving at Paris, place them under the care of the Freemasons. Maître Samson, Montruel's secretary, tries to induce Tristan de Pamiers, king of the law students, to raise a rebellion in favour of Agnes de Méranie against Philip's consort, Queen Ingeburge. Albret, the King's page, takes Eve, *alias* Little Adam, to the King, who gives her permission to visit Ingeburge in her captivity in the Abbey St. Martin. Meanwhile Agnes de Méranie pays a visit to Notre Dame with Amaury Montruel, and stills the ominous cries of the people by distributing among them her paste jewels. In the cathedral she meets Mahmoud-el-Reis, who is carving a figure of the Virgin, and tries to win his regard by presenting him with pearls, which he crushes under his feet when she has gone. Returning from the visit to the cathedral, the members of the Royal party are intercepted by the Free-Lances, but are finally allowed to go on their way. Thinking this wild crew may be of future use to her, Agnes de Méranie determines to enlist the sympathies of their leader, Antoine Cadocu. To accomplish her object she visits him the same evening, accompanied by Montruel, in the low tavern in which he and his followers hold their nightly revels.

CHAPTER IX.

At the Saint-Landry Tavern.

The Rue de la Calandre was occupied, in the reign of Philip Augustus, exclusively by taverns of the lowest description, from which all sorts of horrible sights and sounds emerged at intervals from nightfall till dawn. Wantonness and Riot held high carnival, with Brute Force as King of Revels and all the basest of human passions as his attendant satellites.

It was in a scene of this description that Agnes de Méranie, the chosen wife of the King of France, elected to take part.

She arrived at the tavern when the orgie was in full swing; all restraint had been thrown off, and men, women, nay, even children were revelling madly in the wild carouse. Montruel remained outside as directed, and drew back into the darkest corner he could find as his only chance of safety from an assault that might easily prove fatal. Maître François Gauthier was sitting on an up-turned barrel half asleep. These nocturnal revels had long lost all charm for him, and he lazily opened one eye when an extra loud shriek told him some girl was in danger of having her head broken, or the clash of weapons promised the added excitement of blood-letting.

If Agnes de Méranie had gone in with her face uncovered, her entry would have evoked no curiosity, for the costliness of her dress was no uncommon thing among the women who frequented this place, but she had put on a small dark mask, and the first one who saw her called out:

"A mask! Who's that?"

In an instant she was surrounded by a crowd of excited, more or less intoxicated bacchantes, each one of whom looked ready to lynch the intruder.

But she was not to be daunted, so, raising her voice, she cried:

"Hola! Maître Antoine Cadocu! Will you not protect the guest you have yourself invited?"

"Let's take her to Catherine, and she'll soon scratch her eyes out," shrieked one of the infuriated girls.

Cadocu was still sitting where Montruel had left him, but the table was covered with flagons he had emptied, and his left arm was thrown round Catherine's waist. He had just kissed the girl in the middle of her song, and was praising her singing in amorous tones when Agnes's cry reached him. Catherine jumped up with blanched cheeks and a suspicious look in her eyes.

"Who have I promised to meet to-night?" he said in a thick voice.

"I don't know!"

"Well, then, if you don't know, sweetheart, it must be a rival! Now don't clench those pretty teeth. Oh, Cathos, you're just mad about me!"

"Now then, you others," he shouted, "let her come in if she says I've sent for her, and if she's lying you shall punish her, my dears."

He took another draught to clear his head a little. Agnes crossed the room, still wearing her mask and followed by the tittering, gibing crowd of envious women.

"A mask!" growled Cadocu, "how in the world am I to know who she is?" Then an idea seemed to dawn upon his clouded brain, and he welcomed her with a riotous laugh.

"She's come! Here's a game! Come along, my beauty, I was expecting you. I don't have a Queen to see me every night!"

The word Queen was taken up and repeated on all sides with various comments. Agnes advanced quickly, but Catherine was before her, and tried to get between her and Cadocu, who, however pushed the girl aside, saying roughly:

"Get out of the way, you've had your turn! Now it's hers!"

Catherine slunk back with tears brimming over through her long lashes, for she really loved her capricious master.

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Agnes bent down and whispered something in his ear to which he assented with a vacant smile.

"All right. Don't be afraid. I won't tell any tales."

Catherine dried her tears and prepared to watch closely what this stranger was doing.

"It is the Queen, and I'll be revenged on her!"

Cadocu put his arm round Agnes and drew her down to the empty seat beside him, for he had reached that hazy, indiscriminating stage of intoxication in which one person was pretty much the same as another. An hour earlier Madame Agnes might have appealed to his ambition and gallantry to some purpose, but now he was too far gone to do more than nod with indifferent approval at her artful cajoleries. She tried to interest him in her plans, but though he seemed to grasp the sense of what she said he had not the energy to follow it up: "Let's enjoy ourselves!" he hiccoughed.

"Yes, yes, let's enjoy ourselves," she answered readily, for she still hoped to humour him into acquiescence.

"*Ma foi!* If I'd been certain you'd come, I'd have drunk a little more to make me jolly. Now, I can hardly keep awake." His head fell forward, and then he roused himself with a jerk, and François Gauthier brought a block of wood for him to rest his arm upon. This change of posture seemed to wake him up a little, and he turned to Agnes:

"What can you do to amuse me?"

"Anything you like."

"Can you sing?"

"They used to call me the nightingale in my father's land."

"Ah, your father was a brave man, a fine fellow Can you dance?"

"Like Terpsichore."

"Umph! Don't know her. Can you drink?"

"As much as you like, Maître Antoine," was the unblushing reply.

During this cross-questioning the men and women had been gathering round in a semi-circle, but they dared not come too near, for, drunk as he was, this man was still their master.

Cadocu struck his fist on the table and called out:

"Catherine, Alix and Jeanne, come here!"

Two pretty, saucy girls responded at once to his voice, but the third, Catherine, waited a few seconds, and when she did come her eyes were again wet with tears.

The one named Alix advanced to the table at a sign from Cadocu. She was a splendidly developed girl, with broad shoulders and strong frame, but with a face marred by signs of excess.

"Alix, here is one who boasts that she can drink."

"All right! then we'll drink together."

Agnes de Méranie had not boasted without some reason. In all the festivities at the Louvre she had been Queen of the revels, and from her earliest youth her jewelled drinking-cup had been emptied with a frequency and persistance that would have done credit to a trooper; but then her beverages had been of the rarest and choicest description.

She now seized the cup out of which Cadocu had been drinking and filled it up to the brim. The sickening smell of this strong decoction made expressly for Maître Gauthier's customers nearly choked her, but as she saw a frown gather on Cadocu's brows, she summoned all her determination and emptied it at a draught.

"Now you, my lass," he said, handing the cup to Alix.

"I shan't drink out of that thing!"

Agnes flattered herself that the cup was too large for her rival, but, to her infinite surprise, Alix chose the very largest she could find, and began to fill it with the one Agnes had used. It contained exactly twelve times as much. The girl lifted the huge vessel with both hands and set it to her lips. The veins stood out in her neck and her face grew purple, but she drank on to the very last drop before setting it down. With a gasp for breath she handed it to Agnes saying:

"Now it's your turn again!" Seeing that her rival hesitated, she laughed harshly:

"Oh! that's only the beginning! I can do better than that."

Agnes was too clever not to know when she was beaten, so she took a diamond clasp from her mantle and offered it to Alix, saying sweetly:

"I am afraid I must ask you to excuse me, I am not used to this wine."

She hoped to avoid unpleasantness by this generosity, but Cadocu snarled angrily:

"She can't drink a bit!" and Alix threw back the clasp disdainfully.

"I don't want your jewels! I saw what you gave away outside the Nôtre Dame this evening!"

"Jeanne, come here," called the Captain of the Freelances.

The girl who obeyed his command was one of those in whom the poetry of motion is born, not made. She danced

"A mask! Who's that?"

as naturally as she breathed, and every movement was a fresh revelation of grace and beauty. Agnes had no scruple in showing off her prowess, and she danced well, with the suppleness and elasticity of her race. Flushed with wine and fired by her keen desire for conquest, she surpassed herself in one of the graceful classic dances then in vogue at the court, and which had been imported from the East

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by the Crusaders. Cadocu looked on carelessly, and yawning wearily, he turned to Jeanne:

"Come, child, show her how to dance, for she doesn't seem to know much about it."

Jeanne cleared the table with one light bound, and forthwith began one of those bewildering terpsichorean feats in which the exhilarating joyousness of the gipsy alternates with the seductive languor of the East.

"That's what I call dancing!" said Cadocu, when she had finished. "You don't dance well, madame!" He tried

He fell on his knees before her.

to drink again, but his hand was so unsteady that the contents of his cup found its way on to the floor rather than into his mouth, which was perhaps as well.

"Now, Catherine, *ma mie*, it's your turn."

Catherine's spirits had risen in exact proportion to Agnes' discomfiture, and she now came forward with sparkling eyes and a heart confident of victory. She placed herself in a graceful pose in front of her lord and master and bided her time.

Philip Augustus was a great lover of the old romance songs of heroic deeds, and Agnes had wiled away many a weary hour for him by her sweet singing of the ballads of Roland and Arthur's Knights. She had a beautiful voice, and was complete mistress of the art of managing it, so she took the lute confidently and began a soft prelude to one of her favourite songs. Even that uncouth rabble listened spell-bound, for that which is really beautiful touches a soft spot in the most degraded minds; but one ear was deaf to the witchery of her music, for Cadocu seemed to become more and more irritated by it. At last he said impatiently:

"Enough of that! Do you think we want to listen to that miserable dirge, madame? We might as well be in church. Take the lute from her, Catherine! She can't sing, she can only wail."

This time Agnes realised that this man was not to be won by her, and she regretted her own folly in having exposed herself to this humiliation. Had she succeeded she would not have felt the slightest shame at the step she had taken; but, with the bitterness of failure, all the degradation of her position forced itself upon her mind with hideous reality.

Catherine snatched the lute away and struck up a stirring song of the Free-lances, which she sang with a dramatic power and thrilling sweetness that appealed strongly to her hearers. She concluded with a sneering allusion and a look of malignant triumph towards Agnes, who sat with bowed head and tightly locked fingers.

Cadocu woke up during the wild melody, with its swinging rhythm and haunting refrain, and now drew Catherine once more to his side and kissed her warmly. The girl's face beamed with delight, and she nestled closer to him as he leant on her shoulder and turned to Madame Agnes contemptuously:

"As for you, madame, you have entirely spoilt our evening. Look how quiet they all are! and at this hour I like to go to sleep to the tune of their wild frolics! I called you a queen when you came in, but you're not even that, for Ingeburge of Denmark was the King's wife before you, and no queen would have come to such a place as this, risking her good name and her crown."

"But who's to know?" gasped Agnes under her breath.

"The King knows *all!*" repeated Catherine maliciously.

The well known words struck terror to the wretched woman's heart.

"And if you're not the Queen," pursued Cadocu brutally, "you're no better than these girls here. Not so good in fact, for you're not as beautiful as the poor girl whom your lover, Amaury Montruel, had strangled yesterday morning, and you can't drink, dance, or sing as well as some of them can! So get along with you, for you're no good here!"

After this long speech, spoken at intervals and jerked out in disjointed phrases, Cadocu relapsed into his drunken stupor.

Catherine clapped her hands with a triumphant laugh, and the mad turmoil began anew. Agnes de Méranie fought her way to the door through the thronging, jeering mass of humanity, and escaped in a sorry plight from the scene of her shameful escapade.

CHAPTER X.

A Royal Eavesdropper.

As soon as she reached the street, Agnes de Méranie, choking with rage and mortification, looked round for Montruel, burning to vent her fury upon him. Not seeing him directly, she uttered his name in a low, hoarse whisper, which brought him from his hiding-place in a second.

"Ah!" she groaned, "why did I not take my dagger to that vile den! Sir!" she said turning upon him fiercely, "you lured me into an infamous trap!"

"I—did?" he stammered.

"Silence. You're a coward and a traitor!" she hissed as she took him by the shoulders and shook him violently to and fro in the strength of her passion. Then, as it reached a climax, she struck him sharply across the face with the gold tassel of her girdle. Having thus exhausted her fury the reaction set in, and she fell fainting at his feet in the gutter of the Rue de la Calandre.

The sight of her helplessness completely disarmed her

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lover's natural anger, and he lifted her inanimate form tenderly in his arms and bore her to his house.

Half an hour later they were on their way to the Louvre, Madame Agnes showing no external sign of the agitation she had undergone, save that she was a little paler than usual. Montruel's heart was still heavy and sore within him, first for her headstrong behaviour in going to Cadocu at the tavern, and then at the thought of her savage injustice to himself. When they had reached the Royal Avenue, she stopped suddenly and looked earnestly at him, then said coolly:

"Don't think any more about what happened to-night. I was mad at the time, I think, and I should not like to think that those few minutes had cost me the regard of an old and true friend."

"Madame——" he began tenderly, with a look of infinite love in his eyes.

"That's all right, then," she interrupted hastily. "I see you have forgiven me, and will not think any more about it. It makes my heart much lighter to think I still retain your faithful friendship."

She spoke without emotion, but gave him her hand and suffered him to hold it even after he had kissed it passionately.

"My Queen! I am yours till death! but tell me, shall I not punish that ruffian for his insolence? One word from you, and my archers shall surround the house and burn out these vermin in their hole. Not a man or woman shall live to breathe a word against the Queen's fair name!"

"Thank you. I understand; you think I am afraid and you are trying to reassure me; but, remember, there is the King to protect my good name, he would never believe a word against me. I need have no fear, my lord!"

Then her mood changed, with that swiftness that made her character such a bewildering enigma, and she drew nearer to him, trembling slightly.

"No, no, it's not those robbers and wantons that I fear. I want you to avenge me on her who stands between me and the Crown—who robs my life of all peace and security, and whose existence enabled that brute to tell me to my face that I was no Queen!"

"You have my solemn pledge, madame, that your rival shall soon cease to breathe."

"How can I believe you, when day after day nothing is done? As long as she is above ground my life is in danger, my rank is a mere sham. This council that is to be held may change my fate in an hour!" Her voice sank almost to a whisper as she continued:

"Amaury, do you know what a woman will do for the man who realises the dearest wish of her heart?"

Montruel's heart gave a sudden leap, and then seemed to stop beating as he looked down on her beautiful face, from which all trace of anger had vanished, and which was softened and idealised by the moonbeams that were playing lovingly on it. The pleading pathos in her voice and the emotion with which she seemed overcome, raised his blind infatuation to its fullest height, and a vista of possible delight opened before him. He fell on his knees before her and pressed both her hands to his lips again and again.

"I have said too much," faltered Agnes, whose rôle it was to play the part of alarmed innocence when his passion became too pronounced, "I must be more guarded, or our intercourse will be fraught with danger to me. We had better not meet again for the present, not till you have welcome news to give me."

Amaury began to protest that he could not live without a sight of her, but she was firm, and checked all further remonstrance by playfully laying her hand upon his lips and bidding him sound the horn, for they had reached the palace gates. The draw-bridge was lowered, and they entered the Louvre in silence.

In the large hall where Philip Augustus had received "Maître Adam" that morning, the rosy light of an Oriental lamp was illuminating the pale, emaciated face of Montruel's secretary and confidant, Maître Samson.

If Philip made it his boast that "the King knew all," it is certain that he knew a great deal, and, moreover, that he possessed a genius for acquiring knowledge that would not have come to him in an ordinary way. He was as subtle as Louis XI. and had the faculty of choosing his agents so that they were both secret and reliable.

Maître Samson was standing, cap in hand, before the King, who was reclining on a divan, shading his eyes with one hand from the light.

"Ah, ah," he was saying, "so Amaury Montruel had this girl killed, had he?"

"Yes, my Liege, three miles from Paris, on the way to Etampes."

"Because she knew his secret?"

"Yes, your Majesty, as well as you and I know it."

"And how did you find this out?"

"I met the men coming back from murdering poor Agnes."

"Oh, the poor girl was called Agnes, was she?"

"My Lord Amaury gave her that name," said Samson pointedly.

The King moved his hand so as to study more closely the crafty face before him.

"And when you met those men, what were you doing near Nôtre Dame with the King of the Basoche?"

Samson fidgeted about uneasily for a minute or two, and then, with an expression of undisguised admiration, he replied:

"I should like to know who could hide anything from the King! I was there on business about Madame Ingeburge."

"What about her?"

"Your august Majesty knows that better than I do, of course, but since you deign to ask me, it is my duty to reply. My Lord Amaury wishes to excite the Parisian mob in favour of Madame Agnes, who is still very jealous of Madame Ingeburge."

"Ah!" said the King, looking involuntarily at the door

The King opened a manuscript beside him.

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through which Agnes had appeared just as Eve was leaving him that morning. "So you think that the Queen is jealous, Maître Samson?"

The man made no answer; but looked as if he had more to say and dared not begin it.

"Have you nothing more to tell me?"

"Nothing more," he repeated uncertainly, "no—I don't think——"

"Then you came here to-night expressly to tell me the

She came towards him.

story of that poor girl's death?" demanded Philip with a searching look.

Still Samson shuffled his feet and made no answer.

The King opened a manuscript beside him and said curtly:

"Then if you have no more to tell me, you can go."

His visitor moved towards the door, but instead of opening it he stood still, and, turning his cap round and round in his hand, began:

"May I venture, without presumption, to ask your most gracious Majesty a question?"

"Oh, you've not gone yet? Ask as many questions as you like."

Samson's courage rose and he came back into the room.

"Is my Lord Amaury at the Louvre now?"

"He ought to be here."

"That's another matter," said the wily clerk with a smile, "and Madame Agnes——?" Here he stopped, till the King looked up inquiringly, which he took as permission to go on.

"Is she in her room?"

"Where else should she be at this hour, knave?"

"If your Majesty would deign to say, yes or no."

"Well then, yes, of course the Queen is there," said Philip petulantly.

"Is your Majesty quite sure?" persisted the spy.

"*Quite* sure."

"Your Majesty has seen her there?"

"Yes, I *have* seen her there, you impudent scoundrel!" cried the King, losing all patience.

"Then I have no more to say than humbly ask pardon for having trespassed on your Majesty's most valuable time," and bowing low he made for the door, intending to go out this time; but the King called out testily:

"Here, come back! You're not going to get off like that, you insolent varlet! How do you dare ask *me* such questions?"

"Because—because——"

"Speak out like a man, and tell me the truth, mind, or it shall be the worse for you!"

"Your Majesty shall hear the truth. If Agnes the Fair had been alive, I should not have thought twice about it, but she's dead, and there's no other woman so like the Queen in all Paris."

"Keep to the point, fool, I don't want to hear all this!"

"I made a mistake, sire, I must have done, that's all—" stammered Samson, for the King's eyes were blazing with anger.

"What mistake?"

"I thought, your Majesty must pardon such a wild idea, but I thought that I saw Madame Agnes walking alone with Sir Amaury Montruel down the Rue de la Calandre about ten o'clock to-night. They were close to the tavern where Cadocu and his men go and drink together."

The King burst out laughing, and Samson, with all his guile, could detect nothing forced in his merriment.

"Madame Agnes alone with Montruel, and on foot in such a place and at such an hour! Why, man, you must be mad or drunk! Go home and sleep the drink out of your addled brain!"

Samson made his way out of the room as best he could, feeling that he had made a fool of himself this time. His royal master's mood changed as soon as he was alone. The clock struck mid-night, and Philip repeated thoughtfully, even sadly to himself the words he had so mockingly thrown at Samson.

"Alone with Montruel in the Rue de la Calandre, and on foot at ten o'clock at night!"

He seemed surprised as well as perturbed, and after a moment's reflection he got up and crossed the room to where the heavy silken hangings concealed the door of the Queen's apartments. He pushed them noiselessly aside, and, stooping down, looked through the key-hole like any other jealous or suspicious husband.

"I wonder what she'll tell me, for she's not there, the knave was right so far! No doubt she'll try and persuade me that she never left the room, for she is a woman, and all women are liars in such a strait as that."

As he said this to himself, he heard the creaking of the iron draw-bridge outside, and muttered, as he resumed his seat:

"She has just come into the palace, and a few crowns to the guards will make it all right, so that I shall hear nothing."

He smiled bitterly, and Samson's words rang in his ears with haunting clearness, quickened by his own discoveries. He sat thus in moody cynicism, till he heard a sound in the adjoining room. Then there was a rustle of silk, the curtains were drawn back, and as he looked round, Agnes stood smiling on the threshold.

"Have I waited long enough, my Liege?" she asked, in a soft, caressing voice.

"Have you been waiting then, *ma belle mie?*" was the equally tender response.

She came towards him with a swift, light tread, and murmured:

"I am always afraid of stealing from France any of those precious hours which her beloved King devotes so willingly to her welfare."

She raised her face timidly to his, and he bent down and kissed her white brow, which was still cool with the night air.

"He knows nothing!" she thought triumphantly.

"Alone with him, on foot in the Rue de la Calandre, at ten o'clock to-night!" said Philip Augustus to himself.

But his features told no tales, and Agnes retired to rest calm and smiling in her fancied security.

(To be continued.)

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WHY ARE WE NOT ALL CORPULENT?

This is a question we find answered by the latest specialist in corpulence, a man who, in our opinion, has done more to cure this distressing incumbrance than all the other so-called adipose-therapeutists together. We have Mr. Russell's new edition before us, entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure," wherein he explains that many men can eat an abundance of everything and yet appear lean and hungry, while the next unfortunate cannot eat but scantily without building up a huge frame of unweildly bulk. Thin persons, the author explains, generally have a very strong liver, which vigorously separates from the blood any superfluity of its fatty constituents: *per contra*, the liver of the victim to obesity is constitutionally weak, hence it fails, without assistance, to throw off the carbonaceous and fat-forming foods. The book from which we derive this information is published by Mr. Russell, of Woburn House, Store Street, London, W.C., who has succeeded in manufacturing a purely vegetable compound which has an almost magical effect in the reduction of unhealthy fat. Experimentally it has been given in large doses to those who only carry an amount of fat conducive to the proper production of heat, and the result is that the decoction will not have the remotest effect—not the slightest reduction of weight takes place, while in the case of a superfluity of unhealthy adipose tissue the individual frequently loses 2lb., and much more in serious cases, in twenty-four hours. We should have liked to have pursued this matter further, for it is far more interesting in our opinion than experimenting upon bees, rats, cats, and such like, for what may appear startling in the results of certain foods given to the smaller animals may not be so conclusive or applicable in the case of human beings. We can with pleasure advise our readers to get this book and read for themselves, and, moreover, no one can complain of the price, as it only costs three penny stamps.—*North Bucks Times.*

HOW TO BECOME THIN.

We have received a careful treatise on obesity which we recommend to those who wish that their "too solid flesh would melt." A stout person may pant and groan and sweat under his or her burden for many a year without feeling the necessity of making his last will and testament; nevertheless, when the imperative time does come to make provision for the disposal of his worldly goods, it is very frequently found that the fatal disease is simply a development of corpulency, which checked in time might have added ten years to his life. That corpulency is a disease is very clear, and there is no reason why it should not be regarded in an equally serious light as consumption or any other disease. Yet it is made light of and ridiculed, and the unfortunate possessor of too much fat, instead of securing the sympathy of his fellow-men and women, gets the credit of being a person of gross and intemperate habits, a glutton in fact. Thus, when we see a picture of a fat monk or squire, there is almost invariably present also a big venison pasty, a fat capon, and a flagon of wine; so it is that, unconsciously, and as it seems unjustly, we always associate a big corporation with big feeding. In the treatise recently published by Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Bedford Square, London, whose treatment for the cure of corpulency has become so popular that "doing Russell" has become almost a household word, he clearly proves from his experience in a vast number of cases brought under his notice that stout persons are usually the most temperate. He also makes it very clear that corpulency is a disease, and a dangerous one, too, and while insisting that it should be treated as such, strongly disapproves of the system of attempting to remove superfluous fat by a course of emaciating drugs; pointing out with truth that even where it is possible to get rid of a few pounds of fat by this dangerous means, the reduction is only temporary, and the fat returns more rapidly than it left, and one does not want to be taking physic for ever. In contrast to this doubtful method of procedure, he attacks the disease, as it were, at the fountain head. The medicine he prescribes does not lower, but builds up and tones the system; in short, his aim is to *eradicate, to cure* the disease, and that his treatment is the true one seems beyond all doubt. It is beyond all doubt efficacious. It is perfectly harmless. It is agreeable to take. It does not necessitate semi-starvation. The effects are generally permanent. It is a most exhilarating and strengthening tonic. Send for his book; it is forwarded on receipt of three penny stamps, and well worth reading.—*Ilkeston Pioneer.*

A POSITIVE CURE FOR CORPULENCE.

Any remedy that can be suggested as a cure or alleviation for stoutness will be heartily welcomed. We have recently received a well-written book, the author of which seems to know what he is talking about. It is entitled "Corpulency, and the Cure," and is the cheapest issue (only 3d.) published by Mr. F. C. Russell, of Woburn House, Bedford Square, London. Our space will not do justice to his book; send for it yourself. People are wont to regard fatness as constitutional, and something to be laughed at rather than to be prescribed for seriously; but this is evidently an error, as persons whose mode of life has caused a certain excess of flesh require treatment for the cause of that excess, not by merely stopping further increase, but by removing the cause itself. It is astonishing how long we go on perpetuating error, and how difficult it is to make people disbelieve anything, no matter how palpably false the principal, if it has become at all firmly fixed in the public mind. These facts with regard to obesity, however, are so obvious, that there ought to be no difficulty about their acceptance when once they become known, and, as a matter of fact, the immense number of persons who have already acknowledged their truth by recording the benefits received from Mr. Russell's treatment is simply wonderful. In the case of corpulency, if a simple remedy undertake to reduce a person say 7lb. in a week, all that one has to do is to get weighed, and then prove it conclusively. So it is with Russell's compound, but he asks you to prove it in twenty-four hours only.—*Cork Herald.*

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CONSULTATIONS FREE.

D O. B. wants to know if trains to which dining saloons are attached are licensed to sell intoxicating drinks. ————No, they are not. The only way in which a train could become licensed premises, as the law now stands, would be by getting as many licenses as the number of licensing districts it runs through. No licensing authority can license premises outside of the territory it has jurisdiction over.

Gunner writes: "I have often wondered about the total weight of the shell poured into Sebastopol during the long siege. Have you any idea of it?" ————It was estimated that the batteries of the allied forces threw 30,000 tons of shot and shell into the besieged city.

A. J. is left-handed. He is rather proud of it, for he believes that a tendency to the left is the sign of a strong mind.————It is quite true that such a statement was made years ago by a scientist, but no conclusive demonstration of the theory has been forthcoming. It may interest you to know that nearly all lions are "left-handed." Livingstone and others noticed this peculiarity. When a lion wants to strike a forcible blow he almost always uses the left paw.

James H.—There are more than one hundred and seventy known species of the fly. Think of this when the warm weather comes.

Unbelieving has seen it stated that the physician to the late Tsar began life in the humble capacity of a butcher's boy, and he supposes that Dr. Zakharin succeeded to such an extent because medicine is not much practised "in that benighted country," as he calls it.————You will be surprised to hear that there are some very clever doctors in Russia. As some proof that medicine is not neglected there, I may tell you that nearly forty medical journals are published in the country; there are twenty in Petersburg. The oldest of the medical journals was established twenty-three years ago, another is twenty-one years old, and a third has eighteen winters to its credit.

C. J. asks where fuller's earth comes from.————Chiefly from Bath and one or two places in Surrey. It is dug out in the form of soft stone and, if required as a powder, has to go through a process of manufacture. It is curious to note that large quantities of this substance are imported by the Americans from Bath; one would expect that within such a vast tract of territory sufficient could be obtained for home use.

Superstitious writes to ask if it is true that blood stains can never be removed?————Not from paper, and only with difficulty if they are old from cloth. There is no reason why you should be superstitious about it, the reason is because of the presence of iron in the blood.

D. L.—There are no fewer than sixty persons in Great Britain whose annual income reaches the respectable figure of £60,000. There are nearly two thousand more who receive amounts varying from that sum down to £10,000, while those in possession of £5,000 to £10,000, exceed three thousand in number. Some five thousand people are credited with incomes ranging from £2,000 to £3,000.

Nan.—It is a curious fact that some of our sweetest flowers are unavailable for purposes of perfumery; their scent cannot be extracted. Our chemists imitate these perfumes to meet the demand while they sigh for the discovery of some process which will make extraction possible. Sweet-briar is an instance.

A. L. K. has heard a story about snails which he refuses to believe. Some of these creatures were collected a few years ago off the coast of Lower California and shut up in a box. Six years later, on being placed in some moist earth, one of them began to move about. He thinks this story must be a "Californian."————Such a thing is not improbable at all. Snails are very tenacious of life, and instances of the kind you mention are recorded in many books of reference.

Mac.—The output of Scotch whisky last year showed an increase of 30 per cent. The increase in Irish and English whisky was respectively 13 and 10 per cent. So you are not likely to run short of your night-cap yet, Mac.

Careful.—The first "run" on banking institutions in London was in 1667. Many Lombard Street goldsmiths and bankers had lent out the money entrusted to them and, being called upon for payment, were unable to meet the demand. A crowd of creditors and others assembled and a riot followed in which four bankers were hanged at their own doors before order could be restored and the angry creditors persuaded that they were not being swindled.

Yank.—You are right. Specimens of every gem known to the lapidary have been found in the United States.

Operator.—The total length of the world's telegraph system is not much under 5,000,000 miles. This is exclusive of 1,814,000 miles of submarine cables. This mileage is apportioned as follows: Europe, 1,765,000; Asia, 311,000; Africa, 100,000; Australia, 218,000; America, 2,500,000.

Sawdust would like to know the loss in thickness caused by wood shrinking. ————This is rather vague, but perhaps the following information will satisfy you. Pitchpine beams will shrink from 18⅜in. to 18¼in., spruce from 8½in. to 8 3-8in., white pine from 12in. to 11 7-8in., yellow pine a trifle less, cedar beams from 14in. to 13¼in., elm from 11in. to 10⅞in., oak from 12in. to 11 3-8in. Of course, there may be variations.

H. M.—"Fiasco" originally meant a bottle or a flask. When the Italian glassblowers detected flaws in the vases they were blowing, they made an ordinary bottle of the failure, and hence the name.

Slow, after admitting sorrowfully that he has great difficulty in grasping the significance of large numbers, continues: "I have read articles about the enormous number of soldiers which constitute the 'war footing' of Continental armies, and have tried to imagine what they would look like if assembled on a desert with their ammunition waggons, etc. But I can't do it. Can you give me a 'popular' illustration?"————Perhaps this will help you. If we could have all these men drawn up in single file, with their guns and their ammunition and baggage waggons, the length would be about 24,000 miles. Marching day and night, it would take nearly a year to pass a given point.

Traveller, whose business took him all over France some half-dozen years ago and who has just had another tour of the kind, says that he believes there are fewer foreigners in that country than there were. Is it so? ————Statistics show that there are now 74,000 less than the number stated five years ago. The estimated number of foreigners in France at the present time is 1,027,000.

Micky asks: "How is the age of whales ascertained? I have heard that it is by a similar process to that employed with trees—by rings or layers."————Something of that sort. The age of the whale is calculated according to the number of laminæ, or layers, of the whalebone, which increases yearly. From these indications, ages of 300 to 350 years have been assigned to whales.

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